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MARTYRS OF CARTHAGE.

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MARTYRS OF CARTHAGE

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PREFACE.

It is usual for an Author to prefix a preface to his book, in order to set forth his intention and object in presenting it to the public. In accordance with this usage, the author of this work begs to state that her primary hope and object in writing and publishing a "Tale of the Times of Old," is, that the narrative may be permitted, in some small degree, to promote the glory of God, and further the cause of Christ, by calling the attention of her readers to the *power of Christian faith*, and the *beauty of Christian practice*, as both were exemplified and set forth in the lives and deaths of the primitive believers. May the Lord graciously bless this humble endeavour!

The principal facts and events which are related in this story are, for the most part, historical: and the trials and sufferings of the Christians are authentic. A few trifling anachronisms have, however, been wilfully committed; and names have been altered, and actions, which really took place, have been attributed to individuals who did not perform them, for the sake of increasing the interest of the narrative. But such liberties appeared quite allowable; as the purpose of the story is to show, generally, the nature and severity of the sufferings to which our Christian brethren in those early ages were subjected, and the spirit in which those sufferings were borne: and thus to excite in our own hearts a deep feeling of gratitude for the blessings of peace and security which have so long been vouchsafed to us; and likewise an earnest resolution to buckle on our *Christian armour*, and be ready for any conflict that many await the Church of Christ in these latter days.

It is true that it is only when he is arrayed

in this heavenly panoply that the believer can stand upright, or resist the daily and hourly assaults of his spiritual enemies; which are unremitted, whether in the sunshine of prosperity or the dark days of adversity; and which are frequently more dangerous in the former than the latter, because less visible and less suspected. Therefore, it behoves the Christian to be always armed, and always watching against the wiles of Satan. But, at the same time, it is well for us to mark the conduct and bearing of those who have been engaged in the heat of the battle; and to strengthen our own faith and love by a contemplation of the sublime faith, and unbounded love, that animated these primitive soldiers of Christ; and led them to encounter death, and trials far more severe than death, rather than "deny the Lord who bought them;" or, in the least degree, bring dishonour on His name. "As their day, so was likewise their strength:" and, if our faith is as lively and genuine as was that of our spiritual ancestors,

we shall find, in every change and every circumstance of life, that the same heavenly aid will be accorded to us, and enable us likewise to "endure unto the end," that we may be saved.

KING'S PYON HOUSE, HEREFORDSHIRE.
DECEMBER 1, 1849.

THE MARTYRS OF CARTHAGE.

CHAPTER I.

A noble army—men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light arrayed.
They climbed the steep ascent of Heaven,
Through peril, toil, and pain;
Oh God! to us may grace be given
To follow in their train!—HEBER.

THE Roman Empire was in a state of tranquillity, for the victorious troops of Severus had returned from their expedition into Parthia, whither they had been led by their restless and ambitious commander, to subdne a revolt of the inhabitants of that wild country. The campaign had closed by the siege and capture of Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital; and the successful Roman soldiers were permitted for a while to repose in the fertile valleys and luxurious cities of Syria, and to recruit their

strength and spirits after the severe labours and privations to which they had been subjected during their expedition into Parthia.

Meanwhile their active leader busied himself in visiting many of the cities which lay near his route, and looking into their civil and religious condition, and endeavouring to reform some of the abuses which were but too frequent in this distant portion of the Roman dominions. During his sojourn in Palestine his attention was directed to the rapid progress of the Christian religion; and the great increase, in that country, of the despised and persecuted sect. The number of Jewish proselytes from the ancient Roman idolatry, also attracted his notice, and excited his displeasure; and in order to put an effectual check to the further progress of these religions, he passed a decree, prohibiting, under severe penalties, either Christian or Jews from attempting to make any converts from among the worshippers of the national deities. Severus did not, on this occasion, professedly authorize any active persecution of the members of either of the obnoxious faiths. On the contrary, he conferred several benefits and privileges on his Jewish subjects, whom he regarded with pecu-

liar favour in consequence of their having taken part with him in his contest for the Imperial purple with Pescennius Niger, Governor of Syria, whom he had defeated and destroyed some years previous. For the good service which the Jews had then rendered to his cause, the Emperor had rewarded them by permitting them to enjoy various privileges and distinctions, and also by granting them an exemption from the necessity of discharging certain public offices, which were objectionable to them on account of the expense and inconvenience that attended them. At the same time that he bestowed on the Jews these marks of favour, he also punished the Samaritans, who had espoused the cause of his rival, by depriving them of the dignity of being Roman citizens. The approbation with which the Emperor regarded the fidelity of his Jewish subjects did not, however, induce him to reverse the decrees of his predecessors, by which they were forbidden to enter, or even to approach their holy and beloved city, Jerusalem; and during his reign, as before, they continued wanderers on the face of the earth, without a home, and without a nation.

The indulgence with which Severus regarded the Christians at the commencement of his reign, arose from a very different cause from that which produced his clemency towards the Jews, and it proved to be equally capricious and ineffectual. Soon after his elevation to the throne of the Empire he was afflicted with a lingering disorder, of which he was cured by the skill and care of a Christian slave; and he not only admitted this slave into his palace, but also selected a Christian nurse for his infant son. In a few years, however, his lenient treatment of the sect entirely ceased; and, whether his mind was poisoned by the evil suggestions of their enemies among his courtiers, or whether he was seriously alarmed at their increasing numbers, it is certain that his policy towards them was totally altered; and if he did not expressly direct their persecution and destruction, he yet took no measures to restrain the cruelty of his magistrates and generals, or to stop the dreadful massacres that were perpetrated under the sanction of the very equivocal edict which he had lately promulgated. He even gave to their enemies a further opening for rapacity and oppression,

by publishing a second edict, which prohibited the Christians from attending any *illegal* meetings; and as such, all assemblages of the Church of Christ were considered. These decrees were regarded by the heathen provincial governors, and all others in authority, as the signal for an effort at exterminating their detested fellow-subjects; and a system of persecution immediately commenced, which extended far and wide over the Empire, and was attended with circumstances of barbarity and cruelty that have seldom been equalled, even by the pagan foes of Christ. So violent was the rage of the heathen, and so fiercely did the flames of that enmity (which had, for a time, been suppressed, previous to the accession of Severus, now burst forth, that the Christians deemed that the "perilous times," and the "great tribulation," which are prophesied of the "latter days," had actually commenced.

At no place did the fire of persecution burn more intensely than at Alexandria, where, indeed, on this occasion, it commenced. Severus marched from Palestine into Egypt, after his troops were refreshed and recruited, and took

up his abode for some time in this great and flourishing city; and he was not suffered to reside there long without receiving intimation from the enemies of Christ's Church, of the vast concourse of Christian believers that dwelt not only in Alexandria, but also in other Egyptian cities, as well as at Carthage, and throughout the whole of Northern Africa. To check the further increase of their numbers, and also, as we must suppose, to diminish the numbers of those already holding the true faith, Severus appointed Lætus Governor of Alexandria, and shortly afterwards, Aquila;—both of them being men well calculated to carry out his cruel intentions to the uttermost, and even to go far beyond them.

The Emperor then left Egypt, and returned to Rome, to celebrate his victories in the East, while his unhappy and unoffending Christian subjects were left at the mercy of their heathen oppressors. The war being ended, some of the Roman troops were ordered to be disbanded, and allowed to return to their homes; and among these was the band commanded by Marcus Icilius, the son of the noble Fabius, a wealthy and influential citizen of Carthage.

Marcus had distinguished himself in the Parthian campaign, and was now desirous to return home and claim the congratulations of his family and fellow-citizens on the honours which had been conferred upon him. And one there was at Carthage, whose kind greeting and heartfelt joy at his success and safety would be more precious to him than all beside. The lovely and noble Vivia Perpetua, daughter of his father's friend, Horatius, had been his bride but a few short happy months, when he was called away from his home to join the army of Severus. More than four years had elapsed since he left Carthage, and his little daughter, who was born after his departure, was still a stranger to him.

It was therefore with deep feelings of regret and disappointment that Marcus found, after the Emperor had sailed for Rome, that the order for the disbanding of the cohort to which he belonged had been reversed, and that the troops under his command had been placed at the disposal of Aquila, the new governor, and were to remain for a certain time at Alexandria, in order to assist him in executing the intentions of Severus with regard to the Christians of that city.

Marcus was a heathen, and as such he felt a strong hatred to the Christian sect, whose religion he had from infancy been taught to consider as a degrading and impious faith. Yet the young soldier was not cruel by nature, and he had hitherto never been actively or personally engaged in oppressing the disciples of the Nazarene. But such is the influence of example, and so contagious is the excitement which bigotry and party feeling arouse in the unrenewed heart of man, that Marcus soon found himself carried away by the same feelings that actuated all around him, and joining with enthusiasm in the bitter cries for vengeance with which the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus were everywhere pursued. Even the scene of their trials, and torments, and inhuman executions, became ere long not only the place to which his professional duties obliged him to repair, but also the spot where he learnt to experience a keen delight in witnessing the agonies of his innocent fellow-creatures, and joining in the wild, discordant laugh that burst from the savage heathen populace at the groans and struggles which were extorted from the expiring victims. How true is it that "the dark places

of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty!" It ever has been true, and ever will be so, that where the light of the Gospel of mercy and peace has not extended, there the darkness of heathenism is also the abode of cruelty; and, however civilized, however refined men may be, they are yet in their natural state; and that natural state leads them to delight in acts of blood and vengeance whenever their passions are excited to an adequate pitch.

Marcus was an idolater; and when the worst feelings of his nature were roused by evil example, and irritated by false and calumnious reports against the disciples of Christ, he became a violent and bitter persecutor. All the noble and amiable qualities which had distinguished him among his companions, and had won the love of Vivia Perpetua, seemed to forsake him; and a thirst for blood—for Christians' blood—took possession of him. And yet Marcus deemed all the while that he was only actuated by a laudable zeal for the honour of the gods; and his heathen friends and fellow-soldiers applauded his courage and perseverance in seeking out, and bringing to justice, those

who were even suspected of the crime of worshipping the Nazarene. So thought *Saul of Tarsus;* and he "persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women," until the grace of God overtook him in his evil way, and Jesus called him to become *Paul the Apostle.*

Among the many victims whom Marcus, and his favourite soldier and servant Basilides, were instrumental in discovering and bringing before the bloody tribunal of Aquila, was Leonidas, father of the well-known Origen of Alexandria. This venerable disciple was not to be overcome either by the menaces of the Governor, or the tortures which he inflicted on him, in order to induce him to sacrifice to the gods, or at least to scatter a few grains of incense upon the altar which was placed near his tribunal. The aged Christian firmly refused to compromise his most holy faith by the slightest voluntary act; and Aquila condemned him to be cast into the most loathsome dungeon that could be found in the many prisons of the city. Here he remained for some time, enduring with undaunted patience all the indignities and privations which his inveterate foes could heap upon him: but in

the midst of these bitter trials his spirit was cheered and solaced by the lofty courage and Christian spirit of the youthful Origen, who, as well as his father, had embraced the Gospel of Christ, and was willing to count all things,—wealth, friends, parents, yes, even life itself,—as mere dross, so that he might win Christ, and be found in Him.

In spite of the vigilance with which Marcus caused the prison of Leonidas to be guarded, Origen found means to introduce a letter, containing only these remarkable words—"My father, take care that you do not change your mind on our account." The affectionate son knew well that his father would never deny his Saviour to preserve his life for its own sake; but he feared the effect of his love for his broken-hearted wife and sorrowing children, and he wished him to remember *who* had said, "Whosoever loveth father or mother, or wife, or children *more than me*, is not worthy of me." The devoted youth need not have feared. A few hours after his letter reached the hands of Leonidas, he was led forth, with several other prisoners, to the place of execution, and with them laid down his life for Christ's sake, that

he might receive it again in his Master's kingdom.

The blood of Leonidas and his fellow martyrs did not slake the governor's thirst for vengeance; and his suspicions being excited against Origen, he commanded Marcus to have him diligently watched, and to ascertain whether he was really a member of the Christian church, and as active in making converts as had been reported to him. Both these facts were soon proved, for Origen's boldness in avowing his faith was such, that he seemed to court the honour of martyrdom; and nothing but the care and vigilance of his widowed mother, and her earnest entreaties that he would for her sake conceal himself from those who sought his life, could prevail on him to take those precautions which both reason and religion warrant.

The Lord Jesus gave this exhortation to his disciples, when he forewarned them of the trials and afflictions to which they would be subjected for his name's sake; "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another, for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son

of Man be come." He thus taught his disciples in every age, that although they are by no means to "save their lives" at the expense of denying their faith, they are yet to preserve them by all lawful means; and this, not for their own sakes, but because by so doing they would be enabled to labour yet longer in their Master's service, and carry his Gospel from place to place, whithersoever their enemies might drive them. Acting on this principle the excellent Clement, who was then the teacher of the Christian school at Alexandria, and the ornament of the Church, deemed it expedient to leave the city, and take refuge in a distant part of Cappadocia; but Origen felt and acted differently, and immediately offered himself as his successor. Notwithstanding his youth, for he was then only eighteen years of age, he was appointed to this arduous and responsible office, which he fulfilled with zeal and success. Many of his pupils gave evidence of the purity and strength of the faith in which their youthful teacher had instructed them, by sealing their testimony with their blood.

The rage of Aquila was greatly exasperated by the reports which were continually brought

to him of the number of converts that Origen made; and he went so far as to direct Marcus to employ a band of soldiers to murder him secretly by night. But this coming to the knowledge of his friends, they obliged him to secure his safety by frequently changing his place of abode, and concealing himself in the dwellings of some of the Christians whose rank or influence as yet preserved them and their families from danger. Still notwithstanding the perils by which he was constantly surrounded, this undaunted disciple continued at intervals to issue from his concealment, and openly show himself at the place of execution, where he attended on the martyrs during their agony, and whispered peace to their departing souls. On more than one occasion he escaped as by a miracle, being stoned by the infuriated populace; and several times on returning from visiting the Christians in prison, which was his constant habit, he was seized and dragged through the city by the mob; and, to appease their rage, he was once even permitted to be stretched on the rack, and put to severe torment, by the cowardly and unjust Prefect Aquila, who would willingly have put him to

death, but dared not do so openly, without a legal accusation. It is said that on one occasion the pagans shaved his head after the manner of their idolatrous priests, and compelled Origen to stand on the steps of the celebrated temple of Serapis, and to present palm branches to the worshippers as they entered. He did so; but instead of uttering the words prescribed to him, he cried in a loud voice, as he gave each waving bough; "Come, receive these palms, not as belonging to your idol, but in honour of Jesus Christ." Thus he confessed the faith, and never was "ashamed of Christ or of his doctrine;" and yet in the midst of savage foes, who thirsted for his destruction, the devoted disciple was preserved. His Lord and Master saw fit to employ him yet awhile longer in his service.

Marcus witnessed the courage of Origen, and the constancy of his martyred pupils and fellow disciples, but his heart remained unmoved by their faith and heroism, and his blind and infatuated soul did not discern the beauty and the divine power of that faith which enabled them to triumph over death in its most appalling form, and made them "more than conquerors

through him that loved them." On his follower, Basilides, the effect was different. He had been no less active and energetic than his young commander, in executing the orders of the Prefect; and Marcus had frequently commended his zeal: but one mournful spectacle touched his better feelings, and the grace of God ripened his compassion and admiration into faith.

Potamenia, a very beautiful slave belonging to one of the wealthy citizens of Alexandria, was dragged before Aquila, and accused by her master of being a Christian, and of having spoken disrespectfully both of the Emperor and the Governor, on account of the severities which were employed against her brethren in the faith. Threats, menaces, and tortures were employed to induce her to deny the charge; and promises of life and favour, as the reward of her compliance, were also tried; but equally in vain. A large cauldron of boiling pitch was then prepared near the hall of judgment, and the Prefect declared that she should be stripped and cast into it, if she persisted in her avowal of Christianity. Death did not terrify the courageous maiden, but the attendant circum-

stances of shame greatly moved her; and she besought Aquila with touching earnestness to spare her such needless suffering. "I conjure you," she exclaimed, "by the life of the Emperor, not to suffer my garments to be taken from me. Torture me if you will; and cause me to be let down gradually into the cauldron in my clothes, and you shall see with what patience and courage I am endued by my Saviour Jesus Christ, of whom you are unhappily ignorant." The Prefect was moved by her entreaties, and granted her this favour. He delivered her to Basilides, who was on guard that day in the judgment hall, and commanded him to lead her to instant execution. Basilides obeyed, but he treated her with kindness and courtesy, and defended her from the insults of the populace; though he could not protect her from the cruel doom that awaited her. She was, according to her own request, let down gradually into the burning pitch; and she died, thanking the soldier for his kindness, and promising that after her departure she would pray to the Lord for him. Her gentleness, her modesty, and her concern for his salvation, made a deep impression on the rugged soldier; and it proved to be

not only deep but permanent. He became a secret disciple of Christ, and a pupil of the devoted Origen; and some little time afterwards, being pressed by some of his comrades to utter a profane oath, in the name of one of their gods, he refused, openly avowing that he was a Christian, and that therefore it was unlawful for him to swear by an idol. His companions at first believed that he was merely jesting with them; but, on his persisting in the same declaration they conducted him to the Prefect, in whose presence he made a full confession of his faith, and was immediately cast into prison. There he remained a short time, during which he was constantly visited by Origen, who administered to him the rite of baptism, and also by other members of the Church: and he was then brought forth and beheaded with an axe.

The barbarous pleasure which Marcus had found in attending the torturing and execution of the Christians was greatly checked by the death of his faithful follower Basilides. He was attached to the brave soldier, who had attended him throughout the whole campaign; and he not only regretted his death, but bitterly deplored the folly and weakness, as he

deemed it, which had led him to adopt the superstitions of the Nazarenes, and to sacrifice his valuable life by avowing his belief in the crucified One. Marcus hated and despised the Christians more than ever; but his heart began to grow sick of the spectacles of blood and agony he was daily called to witness, and he yearned for home, and all the domestic joys he promised himself at Carthage. To divert his mind during his protracted residence at Alexandria, he employed his leisure hours in wandering through the vast and wealthy city, and its suburbs, and gazing with admiration at the wonders of ancient Egyptian art, with which the Ptolemies had embellished its squares and palaces. The lofty and beautiful obelisks of granite that stood so proudly at the entrance to the palace, or temple of the Cæsars, attracted his attention in a peculiar degree, and excited in him a strong desire to explore that strange and mysterious country on the borders of the Nile, whose inhabitants had performed such marvellous works of architecture, and had attained to such a high degree of elaborate art, and stupendous mechanical power; a power which neither the proud Romans, nor any suc-

ceeding nation has ever been able to rival. This desire the ardent young soldier would probably have put into execution as soon as he was freed from his present military bondage, had he not been drawn towards Carthage by an influence yet more powerful than curiosity.

The time for his discharge drew near, and he paid frequent visits to the great port, in the hope of finding some vessel bound to Carthage or Utica, with merchandise, in which he could sail, and thus be saved the fatigue and delay of a long journey by land over the rocky and desert country that lay between Alexandria and the city of his home. Among all the ships that crowded that celebrated port from every commercial town in the empire, he could find none that would be ready to take its departure for Carthage at the time he wished, and at which he had promised his anxious wife, by a letter that he had despatched some weeks before, that he would return. Disappointed and weary, he wandered along the western coast of the harbour, and reached the elevated dyke called the Heptastadium, which united the island of Pharos to the mainland, just as the shades of evening were spreading rapidly

over earth and sea, and the bright flames were kindled in the magnificent lighthouse, that then rose majestically on the island. The effect of the brilliant light, as it played on the rippling water, and illuminated the masts and rigging of the grotesque and varied craft that lay beneath, was so striking and beautiful that it made Marcus forget the flight of time, and crossing the bridges that covered the passages at each end of the dyke, he sat down on a rock at the foot of the lighthouse; and while his eyes were fixed on the lovely scene before him, his mind turned from the sickening horrors, and disappointing cares of the day that was closing in, and reposed on the memory of his beautiful and virtuous wife, and the child in whom he already pictured to himself the image of her mother's charms.

As Marcus passed along the dyke he fancied he heard footsteps at some distance behind him; and again, after he had taken his station on the rock, the same sound of footsteps on the dry shingle caught his ear amid the monotonous murmur of the ebbing tide. He did not, however, regard it; for he neither feared nor anticipated danger; but he was startled

when evening had closed, and the foot of the lofty lighthouse was shrouded in darkness, by the rapid approach of a figure which came from behind the building, and approached within a few feet of the spot where he sat. In a distinct, but evidently a feigned voice, the stranger uttered these words:—

"He is not a wise man who leaves his treasure long unguarded; nor is he a happy man, who returns and finds it stolen from him."

Marcus sprang to his feet and cried,

"Who are you who thus come, like a bird of ill omen, to scare away my pleasant thoughts, and fill me with sad forebodings?"

"The sadder your forebodings the more true," replied the figure in a slow and solemn tone, and forgetting to maintain the voice assumed at first. Marcus started, for there was something in that tone familiar to his ear, and yet he could not recal to his memory when or where he had heard it.

"Who are you?" he repeated with vehemence, "explain these riddles, and tell me what is the danger that menaces me, or those dear to me."

"The danger is very near your home," an-

swered the stranger, again disguising his voice. "And I am one who would warn you to rescue your beloved ones, while yet perchance there may be time. Ask not my name, for I dare not tell it."

"I will know it in spite of yourself," exclaimed the soldier, darting forward towards the shrouded figure, and at the same time drawing his short two-edged sword from its sheath. "I will know it, or you shall pay a heavy penalty for thus dogging my path, and mocking me with dark insinuations."

The stranger sprang nimbly aside, and, favoured by the darkness, escaped the powerful grasp of Marcus; he then fled rapidly towards the bridge, and as he crossed it, he turned his head and cried,—

"Despise not my warning. Return to Carthage with haste."

In another moment his form, which was dimly seen on the bridge, was lost in the gloom that extended round the base of the lighthouse, and again he quickly became visible as he ran along the shore, and the gleaming light from the summit fell brightly on his track. Marcus did not pursue him, for, at the moment, he

was disposed to treat the warning with scorn, as the ill-timed jest of some mischievous youth. But this feeling did not continue. There was something, not only in the voice, but also in the form and action of the stranger, that, even in the gloom, had seemed to him familiar, and associated themselves with Vivia and his home. Could any danger threaten her, and of what nature could that danger be? And who was he who thus, in a strange place, followed him thus secretly, to warn him of evils impending far off at his home? Of Vivia's attachment and constancy to him he could not entertain a doubt; such a doubt would have maddened him; and yet the letters which he had received from her during his residence at Alexandria, had sometimes struck him as being written in a less cheerful tone than he expected; and the joy she expressed at the prospect of their meeting after so long and painful a separation, had more than once appeared to him less unmixed with doubt than he could have desired. It is true, at the time, these misgivings had been slight and transient, and had quickly given way to the happy confidence he felt of being the chief and only object of Vivia's love, even

from her earliest youth: but now the painful feelings returned again, and even with more force and intensity, and the daylight dawned over the opposite point of Lochias, and the watch-fires were extinguished in the tower above his head, before Marcus had left his seat on the silent isle, or decided on the course which he would pursue.

Having thus decided, he hastened to the house of the Prefect, whom he found already risen, and preparing for his almost daily occupation of listening to accusations against the Christians. From the wealthy among them, he extorted large sums of money as a sort of tribute, which was paid, in many instances, by the Christians during this persecution, not only to the government, but also to the informers and soldiers, to purchase permission to celebrate, unmolested, their own forms of worship: but the poorer sort, who had no gold to satisfy the rapacity of their enemies, were condemned to shed their blood in anguish to satiate their vengeance. The soul of Marcus was now occupied with other feelings than those of bigotry and cruel superstition; and, heedless of the crowd who already thronged the chamber

of Aquila, he pressed towards him, and preferred an urgent request to be allowed immediately to return to Carthage. The governor expostulated with him, and endeavoured to persuade him to remain, at least for another day, that he might take part in the exciting spectacle, to which all the heathen in Alexandria were looking forward with impatience and delight. That very afternoon, six devoted and unconquerable Christians were to be exhibited in the arena of the amphitheatre, in mortal conflict with wild beasts, and would Marcus voluntarily forego the sight? Such cruel and revolting shows were always among the most exciting enjoyments of the ancient heathen; and when to their habitual love of these spectacles was added the bitter hate they felt towards the Christian victims, their excitement knew no bounds.

Marcus, however, was proof on this occasion to all the temptations set before him. He urged his request with such eager perseverance, that the governor was constrained to comply; and he gave him permission to place his troops under the command of the officer next in rank to himself, and to repair to Carthage without delay.

CHAPTER II.

Thou art gone to the grave! but we will not deplore thee,
Though sorrows and darkness encompass the tomb,
Thy Saviour has passed through its portals before thee,
And the lamp of His love is thy guide through the gloom.

Thou art gone to the grave! but we will not deplore thee,
Whose God was thy ransom, thy guardian, and guide;
He gave thee, He took thee, and He will restore thee;
And death has no sting, for the Saviour has died!

HEBER.

AT the period when the Edict of Severus, which caused such affliction and suffering to the Christians, was published, the Church at Carthage was in a very prosperous and flourishing condition. Like every other important Christian assembly, it was governed by a Bishop or Inspector, who presided over the whole community. To this important office he was called by the elective voice of the congregation, and his duties were great and responsible; for not only the spiritual oversight and superintendence of the Church devolved upon him, but he had likewise, in these

perilous times, to be a watchful guard over the temporal safety and interest of the flock who committed themselves to his care. To lessen the burden of this difficult and responsible duty, the Bishop was assisted by a council of Presbyters, the number of whom was left to his own discretion; and to every one he appointed his peculiar sphere of action, and placed him in a certain station, in which he was to use all his energies to promote the interests of the Church.

The comparative security and tranquillity which the Church had enjoyed for some time previous to the accession of Severus, and during the first few years of his reign, had naturally caused a considerable increase in the numbers of professing believers; but the time was come for putting their professions to the proof, and manifesting openly to God and man who were of the number of true Christians, and who were hypocrites and self-deceivers;—who were "the good wheat," and who "the chaff."

The persecution, which commenced at Alexandria, spread rapidly over the whole of Northern Africa, and Carthage became the scene of similar atrocities to those which were

enacted in the Egyptian capital. Saturninus, the Roman Proconsul of Africa, very soon gave proof that he did not regard the Imperial edict against the making of converts as intended merely to check the further progress of Christianity, without endangering the safety, or interfering with the comfort of those who were already baptized. On the contrary, he made it the pretext for instituting a severe persecution against all who bore the name of Christ, whether old or young, rich or poor; and whether they had been brought up in the obnoxious religion, or were recently converted from heathen idolatry. The security of any church, or of any individual, and the permission to pursue unmolested their own mode of discipline and worship, was now only to be purchased by large sums of money; and for this purpose collections were made in distant countries, where as yet the flames of persecution had not burst forth with violence, and sent by the members of the church to their brethren in the most oppressed and suffering districts:—and none needed this benevolent aid more than the churches of Africa. But the peace and safety thus obtained by the Christians

was neither secure nor permanent. Frequent pretexts were found by the magistrates for breaking through the covenants they had made, and fresh extortions were resorted to until the objects of their hatred and cupidity had sacrificed all their worldly goods, and were obliged either to flee in poverty to some far distant land, or frequently to suffer imprisonment, and even death, as the penalty of their attachment to their faith.

Many such instances occurred at Carthage, and the members of the Church in that city displayed no less constancy and fidelity to their Saviour than had been exhibited by the Alexandrian Christians. Among these was one of the Presbyters named Numidicus. At the very commencement of the persecution his wife Sabina was arrested, and thrown into prison, where she was detained, and subjected to great privations, notwithstanding the efforts of the Presbyter to obtain her release, even if it should be only commuted for the sentence of banishment. Gladly would he and his only daughter, Marcella, have accompanied her to the most barbarous region in the Empire, if thus they could have purchased that life which

was dearer to them than aught on earth beside, their faith only excepted. But while Numidicus laboured eagerly for the release of his beloved wife, he continued to urge her by letters and messages, which he found means to transmit to her from time to time, to "hold fast the profession of her faith without wavering;"—and to "endure even to the end," rather than preserve her valuable life by "denying the Lord who bought her."

Numidicus, though a zealous and devoted Christian, had some friends among the heathen inhabitants of Carthage;—friends who had loved and esteemed him for his noble qualities and amiable disposition, when he, like them, knew of no higher principle than honour, and aimed at no more exalted virtue than morality. Many of his companions and associates had deserted him when, several years previous to the time of which we are speaking, he became a Christian, and openly abjured idolatry; and, in some instances, the regard they had felt for him was changed to hatred and contempt; and the piety and holiness, the purity and self-denial, that were conspicuous in his life and conduct, only served to exasperate their feelings still further.

His noble and wealthy friends, Fabius and Horatius, were not, however, of this number. They both still equally hated and despised his religion, and they wondered how their wise and excellent friend could have suffered himself to have become the dupe and victim of such a degrading superstition as that religion appeared to them. But they could not hate or despise Numidicus. They had known him too long, and too intimately, not to reverence his character, and feel sure that whatever he had done had been from pure conviction. Such feelings, and such appreciation of character, were not uncommon, even among pagans; and they served, in a few solitary instances, to soften the severity of the afflictions that befel the followers of Jesus, and to gild the edge of the dark cloud of tribulation that hung so heavily above their devoted heads.

Fabius was, as we have before mentioned, father to Marcus Icilius, and he was one of the chief magistrates of Carthage. He was highly esteemed for the justice and moderation which he exercised in most of the cases that fell under his jurisdiction; but at the same time he was a severe judge in all questions of

apostasy from the national religion; and showed himself willing to act with the Proconsul in all his efforts to prevent the progress of Christianity, and chastise the obstinacy of those who refused to abjure its tenets and practices. The bitterness of his hatred to the disciples of Christ was greatly aggravated by the fact that he had himself, in his younger days, been convinced of the truth of Christianity. He had connected himself with the church of Carthage; and, after passing satisfactorily through the classes of catechumens, he had even been admitted into the Church by baptism, as being supposed to be a true member of the flock. Unhappily, however, his conversion was not a real one. He had been attracted and interested by the doctrines of Christianity; but their saving influence had not affected his heart; and when "tribulation and persecution arose, because of the word, immediately he was offended." He fell back into heathenism and idolatry; and his apostasy was rewarded by his being placed in a high civil situation, where he employed his newly-acquired power for the ungenerous purpose of persecuting his former friends.

When Fabius had professed himself a Christian, Numidicus was altogether unconnected with the sect, and their friendship had continued undisturbed by the change in his religious principles. But when, many years later, Numidicus also became a convert, and heartily embraced those tenets which his friend had so lightly adopted, and as lightly renounced, Fabius had for some time broken off all intercourse with him. This was deeply regretted by the Presbyter, as he always hoped to be the means of again uniting his apostate friend to the Church; and with this view he had used every means in his power to conciliate him. In this he had succeeded, and their intimacy was renewed, and continued undisturbed till the period of which we are speaking. Still Numidicus made not the slightest progress in bringing his friend to repent of his apostasy, and return to the bosom of that Church which he had so deeply injured. The friendship that he bore to Numidicus did not incline his mind, or soften his heart towards the now hated sect which he had deserted; and it was very rarely that the Presbyter's influence could prevail on him to remit any part of

the heavy fines, or soften any of the cruel sentences which were pronounced by Saturninus, and willingly executed by his inferior magistrate, Fabius.

In the case of Sabina he did indeed relent so far, out of regard to her husband, as to join with Horatius, the father of Vivia, in interceding with the Proconsul that the sentence of death pronounced against her should be commuted for perpetual banishment. But Saturninus was so exasperated at her obduracy, in which he was informed she was encouraged by the Presbyter, that no arguments or entreaties could prevail on him to remit the capital punishment; and Sabina expired at the stake, bearing good testimony to the faithfulness and loving-kindness of Him for whose name's sake she was content to suffer and to die.

Deeply did Numidicus and Marcella lament the death of the blessed martyr; but much did they glory in her constancy, and rejoice in the conviction that her warfare was accomplished for ever, and her spirit was reposing in the presence of her Saviour. To preserve her life they had been willing to go with her into

banishment; but now that she was gone to her rest, no considerations of personal safety could induce the Presbyter to leave the spot where her ashes had been buried by his sympathizing brethren,—the spot where he had first learned to love the name of Christ, and where he and his now sainted wife, and only child, had been baptized into that holy name, and admitted as members of his "little flock."

Marcella's grief at her mother's awful death was so profound, and her dread of the same sad fate overtaking her zealous and self-denying father was so great, that, forgetful of every other tie to Carthage, she urged Numidicus to flee to some safer retreat, and "hide for a little season until the indignation should be overpast." But he was immoveably fixed in his resolution to remain with his brethren at Carthage, and abide the Lord's will, whatever it might be. And soon his high-minded daughter recovered her natural courage, and her trust in God's good providence; and she learned to rejoice in her father's determination, and to share his desire to "spend and be spent" in the service of his Master, and dedicate his life to the endeavour to win souls from the bondage of

heathen superstition, and introduce them to the glorious liberty of Christ.

She soon found an opportunity for the exercise of her Christian feelings of charity and zeal, in the renewed intimacy that sprang up between herself and Vivia Perpetua, the beautiful and amiable wife of the young soldier, Marcus. Since the period of his conversion to Christianity, the Presbyter had carefully kept his daughter from all familiar intercourse with her former pagan associates; and although he retained his friendship for Horatius, he did not suffer Marcella to frequent his house as she had formerly done, or to continue the intimacy with Vivia which had subsisted from their earliest childhood. Numidicus feared the influence of old habits and old associations on the yet unfixed principles of his daughter. But during her mother's imprisonment, and since her dreadful death, Marcella had displayed such firmness and devotion, such love to her Saviour, and attachment to his cause, that the Presbyter felt no fears of her "looking back" to the Sodom from which she had been so graciously rescued, except to rejoice in her own escape, and use all her endeavours to bring others into a like state

of safety. The kind interest which Horatius had felt in the fate of Sabina, and the zeal with which he had seconded all the efforts made by Fabius for her preservation, had also greatly strengthened the affection that Numidicus had so long entertained towards him, and the earnest desire he already felt to be the means of bringing him and his family to the true faith. He therefore no longer forbade the intercourse that had for some years almost entirely ceased between their respective families; he only exhorted his daughter to lose no opportunity of making this renewed intercourse profitable to her friend; and to watch and pray diligently that it might in no way prove injurious to herself.

Gladly did Vivia Perpetua receive the daughter of the Christian Presbyter, when once again she visited her in her father's house. The young matron had returned to the paternal roof when her husband was called to join the army of Severus; and she had continued to reside there, in privacy and seclusion, during the long and irksome period of his absence. Hitherto the care of her little Elva, who was now more than four years old, had been her greatest, and almost her

only pleasure; and she had frequently regretted the circumstances which forbade her seeking consolation in the society of her former friend, Marcella. She had hoped for the speedy return of Marcus, when the news of the successful termination of the Parthian campaign had reached Carthage. But the lengthened stay that the Emperor made in Syria, had again and again disappointed her hopes: and when at last he led his troops into Egypt, and letters arrived from the impatient Marcus to assure her that a few weeks would restore them to each other, she was again doomed to a renewal of suspense and anxiety. Many months elapsed, and still the young centurion was detained amid the scenes of blood and cruelty that polluted the Egyptian capital; and Vivia felt most bitterly how "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

The company and conversation of Marcella were consequently doubly welcome to her during this period of anxiety; and many a long and weary hour was beguiled and cheered to the two sorrowing friends, by talking to each other of their respective griefs. Though Vivia was a pagan, she was not so bigoted as to refuse to listen to the oft-told tale of Sabina's constancy

and sufferings, or to withhold her sympathy from the bereaved, yet uncomplaining daughter. Vivia had known and loved Sabina in the happy years of her childhood and early youth, before religious differences had alienated their respective families; and she deeply regretted that what appeared to her so unworthy a cause, should have deprived Marcella of a beloved parent, and herself, and her mother Portia, of a much valued friend. So she listened patiently while Marcella spoke of the anguish she and her father had endured, and of the bitter struggle they had felt between natural affection and the desire that the cherished wife and mother should honour God in her death, and hold fast the faith which she had embraced.

Vivia had often heard her father and brothers speak of the obstinacy of the heretics, whose deaths they had witnessed since the persecution first broke out in Carthage; and she had wondered how any one could voluntarily go through such trials and agonies, merely for the sake of worshipping one God in particular, instead of giving honour and worship to all the gods in the heathen calendar equally. But while Marcella detailed the progress of her mother's faith,

from the first ray of light that entered her mind, until she was enabled to cast away all vain superstition and idolatry, and to live to Christ, and die for Christ, Vivia felt an emotion of respect for the religion of the Christians that she had never before experienced. She could not deny to herself that there must be something elevating, ennobling, in the faith that produced such undaunted courage, even in females and children; and for which so many had resigned their lives with cheerfulness. She felt a growing desire to be made acquainted with the nature and ground of that hope which inspired the martyrs with joy, even during the agonies of the rack or the stake: and most willing was the devoted Marcella to instruct her friend in all the blessed truths that she had learnt from her father.

But Vivia Perpetua dreaded lest her parents or her brothers should overhear her conversing with Marcella on a subject so obnoxious to all their feelings and prejudices; and on the plea of obtaining exercise and bracing air for herself and her little girl, she frequently led her companion out of the heated city to the north-west coast of the peninsula on which it stood; and

there they seated themselves on some elevated portion of the ruins of ancient Carthage, while Elva played around them, and gathered bright flowers among the scattered monuments of Tyrian splendour.

Even at that time but little remained to tell of the extent and riches of this once celebrated city, except the broken ruins of massy walls and lofty pillars, and the numerous and spacious cisterns by which the dense population of old Carthage were once abundantly supplied with water. The only relic of Tyrian architecture that had been left standing, when the Roman Senate decreed the utter destruction of the city, was the great aqueduct, which still stretched across the plain in solitary grandeur, to remind the passer-by of the wealth and splendour that once overspread the plain, and of the cruelty and barbarism of the Roman conquerors who destroyed it.

In this lonely place, tenanted only by wild birds, and now and then by a skulking wolf that shunned the light of day, did Vivia and Marcella, and their infantine companion, pass hour after hour in earnest conversation; so earnest, that it made the time fly swiftly; and

not unfrequently they so far forgot its progress that Lucretia, Vivia's faithful nurse, would send her son, Rufus, to warn them of the close of evening, and guard them during their way to the dwelling of Horatius, which was situated in the outskirts of Colonia Carthago, or the Roman Carthage.

Little did Horatius, or his wife Portia, suspect that their daughter could find occupation for her mind, and interest for her feelings, during her husband's prolonged absence, in listening to the doctrines of Christianity, as simply stated by her young companion. Had they entertained such a suspicion they would have instantly put a stop to the intimacy so eagerly renewed by both the friends. But their confidence in Vivia's attachment to the religion of her parents and her nation was so great that they apprehended no danger from her intercourse with the Presbyter's daughter; nor did they suppose that a maiden of Marcella's tender age and retiring manners, and who had already suffered so severely from her parents' desertion of their ancient faith, would be disposed to attempt the conversion of a noble matron, such as Vivia, or dare thus to

bring upon herself and her father the indignation and the vengeance of a wealthy and powerful family.

This family consisted of Horatius and his wife, Octavius, their eldest son, Vivia Perpetua, and a younger son, named Julius Satur. Octavius had entered the army while yet very young, and was at present with the cohort to which he belonged, on duty at Rome. He was a noble-hearted young man, and highly endowed with all the courage, and all the heroic virtues that befitted a Roman soldier, and a Roman citizen. Brave, handsome, and intelligent, he was admired by his comrades, and adored by his family. As boys, he and Marcus Icilius had been chosen friends, and the similarity in their dispositions had caused their friendship to ripen with their years. In all the manly and athletic exercises, so much practised by Roman youths, they equally excelled; and seldom failed to bear away the prize of victory when they contended in wrestling or racing with their other companions. Their intimacy had led to the mutual attachment of Marcus and Vivia, and it was with the deepest satisfaction that Octavius had seen his lovely

sister betrothed, and in due time married, to one whom he considered so worthy of her as his valued friend, Marcus.

His brother Julius Satur was several years his junior, being the youngest of the family; and, from his misfortunes, an object of peculiar interest to all. In his infancy he had met with a severe accident, which had greatly injured his health, and rendered him slightly deformed. Being unable to take any part in the active exercises in which his brother and his young companions delighted, he had turned his attention to literary pursuits, and being gifted with excellent abilities, he had made great progress in the learning of those times. The remarkable sweetness of his disposition, which was not in the least degree affected by the constant privations he endured, rendered him peculiarly dear to his family; and his strong and highly-cultivated mind, and sound judgment, made him frequently the guide and counsellor of his wilder-spirited brother, as well as of his elder sister, Vivia.

The attachment of Octavius to his feeble and afflicted brother, was very striking, and very beautiful. Even in the days of his boy-

hood he would leave his favourite sports to attend on Julius, and minister to his wants and wishes; and often when the invalid was more than usually feeble or suffering, the manly arm of his brother supported him to the sea-shore, that he might enjoy the refreshing breezes: and sometimes Octavius might be seen bearing him over the rugged spots that intervened between the new and old cities, with the care and gentleness of a nurse, while Vivia walked beside, carrying books or a lyre, to beguile the sufferings of Julius.

Never did Octavius appear to such advantage as during these hours of self-devotion to his young brother; and Marcella, who, in those happy days, was the constant companion of Vivia, had never forgotten the expression of his fine countenance, or the tone of his manly voice, while he subdued his wild spirits, and endeavoured to soothe the pain, and enter into the pursuits of the afflicted Julius.

Octavius left Carthage before the conversion of Numidicus to Christianity had alienated the younger members of his family from that of the Presbyter, and he had borne away with him the image of the young and gentle Mar-

cella, which no variety of scene or occupation had ever obliterated from his mind. Letters had reached him from his home, telling him of the apostasy of Numidicus, and his appointment to an office in the Christian Church; and he had deeply regretted it, not only on his own account, but on his daughter's also. Again he had heard of the conversion of Sabina, and her dreadful and heroic death; and, lastly, Vivia had conveyed to him the terrible intelligence, that Marcella also was supposed to have become a worshipper of the crucified Nazarene. The truth or the falsehood of this report Vivia was unable to certify, as all intercourse had, at that time, ceased between herself and Marcella, but there was every reason to believe that she had embraced the religion to which her parents were so devoted; and Vivia consequently exhorted her brother to dismiss all recollections of her former friend from his mind.

But when the intimacy between the two young women was again renewed, and all the love that Vivia had entertained for the companion of her youth had returned, and she found in her own heart, a growing interest in the truths and doctrines which once she had held

in such detestation, then she blamed herself for having tried to alienate her brother's affections from Marcella; and, in the next letter which she found an opportunity of dispatching to him at Rome, she expressed her great pleasure in being again permitted to enjoy her beloved friend's society, and her hope that when Octavius returned to Carthage, he would only find her more attractive than ever. Vivia did not tell her brother the secret feeling that inspired this wish. She did not confide to him her hope, almost unacknowledged to herself, that he too would find an interest in hearing Marcella talk of the Saviour she loved so devotedly, and in listening while she repeated the doctrines she had learnt from her father, or while she read passages from a precious little manuscript that Numidicus sometimes confided to her care, and which contained one of the Gospels, and a few of St. Paul's Epistles.

Octavius was surprised at his sister's letter, and quite unable to account for her very rapid change of sentiment and opinion, with regard to her young friend. But correspondence was then a tedious affair, and he might probably have to wait for months, before the anxious

inquiries he desired to make could reach Vivia, and be replied to. He must be left to his impatience and his speculations,—to his fond remembrances of Marcella, and his indignant surprise, that she should lend a willing ear to the fables of the Christians; and we must mark the progress of the truths which had enlightened her once dark mind, in dispelling also the thick veil of heathen superstition, which yet shut out from her friend's spiritual vision a full and saving view of the Sun of Righteousness.

CHAPTER III.

Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.—*Acts* iv. 12.

"MARCELLA!" exclaimed Vivia, after a long and thoughtful pause, as they slowly wandered one day beneath the tamarisk trees that grew in clusters among the ruins of Tyrian Carthage, "Marcella! I cannot banish from my mind your last remark, that if Jesus of Nazareth had been an impostor, as I have always been taught to regard him, he would not have refused the worldly honours that his disciples offered him, and have given himself up to die, when by that death all his false pretensions would have been annihilated. Nor would his followers so boldly have avowed their faith in him, and have spent their lives in proclaiming his name, and have died rather than deny it, if they had not possessed sure and certain convictions that he was able to behold

and reward their fidelity. I confess myself to be such a coward;—I feel such a shrinking from a violent and agonizing death, that no argument you have used to convince me of the divinity and immortality of your God has had such weight with me as this;—that he himself shed his blood voluntarily in confirmation of his pretensions; and that his immediate followers, and a great multitude of his disciples, in later years, have cheerfully laid down their lives in testimony to their faith in his power and Deity."

"I rejoice sincerely, my dear Vivia, if any thing that I have suggested is tending to convince you that Jesus Christ is indeed 'Lord over all, God blessed for ever.' It will be one of the happiest moments of my life, when I hear you confess this great truth, as I feel confident you will, ere long, be constrained to do. But the argument which appears to have impressed your mind so deeply at this moment is not the point that struck me most forcibly when my dear sainted mother led me, step by step, in the path of heavenly truth; or when my father and his friends, the Deacons of our Church, laid before me, in simple language,

the unanswerable arguments for the truth of our holy religion. It was the exquisite and touching beauty of the Redeemer's character—his personal human character, as described by the Evangelists,—that melted my heart, and removed all my prejudices against the religion that he taught. Oh! there is something in the narrative of his daily life,—his works of mercy,—his words of love,—his acts of piety,—his gentleness, his majesty, his calm devotedness to the cause for which he came into the world,—that commands my faith, and calls forth my adoration far more than even his voluntary death. I can conceive an impostor dying to support his assumed character; and we know how many instances have occurred among our own ancestors of voluntary and heroic self-sacrifice, from far less powerful motives. Men,—mere men,—may lay down their lives courageously, even when they are not actuated by religious motives;—but no mere man could live as Jesus lived, and speak as Jesus spake, and act as Jesus acted! Oh no! even the officers who were sent by his enemies to take him, were awed by the serene majesty that dwelt in his words and actions. They returned

to their employers empty-handed, and exclaimed, 'Never MAN spake like *this man!*' They said the truth."

"You are very enthusiastic," replied Vivia, with a faint smile. But she was deeply impressed with her friend's animation, and depth of feeling. "I wish, Marcella, that I could either feel the conviction that you feel, or else that I could forget all you have said to me, and fall back into what you call idolatry. I was happy once in my belief in the existence and superintending government of the gods. I seemed to live in their presence without fear and anxiety; trusting in their protection now, and fully convinced that a virtuous life here would be rewarded by a happy immortality hereafter. But now, all my peace is fled. I hailed the restoration of your society, as that which would cheer my spirits, and divert my thoughts in this lengthened absence of my husband,—and it has done so. While listening to you, I have even ceased, at times, to think of Marcus; and while you have spoken of the heavenly hopes that your religion inspires, I have even been carried above that hope of perfect happiness when he returns, that has for four long years

engrossed my thoughts. But I am not happy now. A deep and anxious feeling has entered my breast, and I cannot shake it off. I must go forward:—I must know all that you know, and I must believe all that you believe, or I shall never be at peace again."

"Dearest Vivia," replied Marcella, "you shall, indeed, know all that I can tell you of the Christian's Lord and the Christian's hope:—and God grant that you may believe it as firmly as I now do! And you shall know more; for I hope to be able to bring my father here some evening, and he will answer your inquiries, and satisfy your doubts far better than I can do; and your mind is so much more powerful than mine, that you will be able to receive and comprehend at once those mysterious points in our doctrines, that I could only be taught slowly, and by degrees. I know, by experience, that the path from errors such as we were both brought up in, to the truth of the Gospel of God, is a painful and difficult one. But you have taken the first steps. You have, by God's grace, been enabled to acknowledge One only and Almighty God, as the object of your worship, instead of the multi-

tude of false and material deities to whom you so lately offered adoration. You now own Jehovah as the Eternal God, in whom we, and all the universe, 'live, and move, and have our being;' and I doubt not, but you will soon feel the power and the divinity of that Revelation, which He has made of Himself to the world in the Holy Scriptures; and you will learn to praise Him for the plan of redemption which He has there set forth to fallen man, and to rejoice in the Redeemer, whom He has bestowed on the whole human race, as *your own* SAVIOUR from merited condemnation and eternal misery."

"But, Marcella, I find it hard to believe that I have merited such condemnation and misery. I have lived an innocent life; and if I have entertained an erroneous faith hitherto, that cannot be imputed to me as sin, for I have only held the doctrines that were taught me as a child;—the doctrines in which our ancestors lived and died, and which my excellent parents now believe to be true. Surely you do not think that they will be condemned to everlasting woe; they who are loved and respected by all who know them for their upright cha-

racters and virtuous conduct! No, Marcella, that can never be! The one supreme God of earth and heaven can never deal so severely with the creatures He has made. His goodness and His justice alike forbid it."

"Alas! Vivia, you still hold one fatal error, and reject one fundamental truth. You believe that all mankind enter the world in a state of innocence and purity; and that they are able, by their own strength, to maintain that innocence, and thus merit the favour of God, and future happiness, unless they forfeit these blessings by some flagrant crime or open impiety. I once felt all this likewise; and it was long before my proud and stubborn heart could be brought to acknowledge and bewail its own corruptions, and its own helplessness. Therefore it was long before I could be made to feel my need of a Saviour, and to perceive the exquisite mercy of God's plan of redemption; and the perfect suitableness of the Saviour whom He has provided, to all my wants and infirmities. But when once the truth of God's Word was impressed by His Spirit on my soul, I saw my own inward vileness, and I felt how hateful I must be in His sight;—in

His sight who tells us that 'He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.' And then, Vivia, I trembled at His wrath;—at His wrath who says again that 'He will by no means clear the guilty.' And oh! what would have become of me under the burden and dread of these convictions, if I had not also been led to the knowledge of a Saviour? How joyfully did I then believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the 'Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!'"

"Dear Marcella," replied Vivia, hesitatingly, "you would carry me on too fast. I have said that I cannot rest in my present troubled, uncertain state of mind; but yet I cannot so quickly follow you to the conclusion at which you have so happily arrived, (for I do feel that it must be happiness to hold the faith that you now entertain so confidently). You must first convince me that I am lost, before I can believe myself saved. You must show me that I am under the wrath of God, before I can see the necessity that His own Son should shed His blood in order to appease that wrath. I do feel much less satisfied with myself, and my own conduct, than I did before I had so much

conversation with you; but yet it appears to me that I am able to leave off all that I now consider to be wrong, and to do all that I judge to be right; and if I do so, why should I fear condemnation?"

"I wish I was more eloquent, Vivia, and that I was also more versed in the Holy Scriptures; and I should have no fear of not being able to answer all your questions, and satisfy all your doubts. May God help me while I try to repeat to you those passages of His word that so plainly declare the natural corruption of the human heart, and its proneness to actual sin; and also the deep guilt of every sort of sin in His sight; even of those sins which we deem to be trifling. But tell me first, dear Vivia, do you still acknowledge the Scriptures, which we Christians hold so sacred, to be indeed the word of God; and, as such, infallible? And are you willing to receive the declarations of that word as the revealed will of Jehovah, to which all His creatures are bound to pay unconditional obedience? You did go thus far with me in our last conversation; and you seemed much impressed with the solemn thought that the Creator of the universe should deign

to communicate His will thus clearly to mankind, and to give a divine rule of conduct to His intelligent creatures."

"Yes, Marcella, I think I am convinced that the Christians' Bible is the inspired word of God. What you have read to me from the Gospels and Epistles, and repeated to me from the Old Testament, as you call it, has been sufficient to show me that the Scriptures are a divine production; and I am willing to be taught by them. Show me, then, that those Scriptures do really declare that such individuals as you and I, and others who appear to me to lead blameless lives, are nevertheless exposed to the wrath of God, and in danger of eternal punishment, and I will believe it. And then, I doubt not, I shall also be ready to look to the merits of another for salvation, and to accept as my Saviour that Jesus whose life and death I acknowledge to have been far above the attainment of mere humanity."

"Then, Vivia," exclaimed Marcella, with joyful animation, "I shall soon hail you as a sister in the faith. With such a teachable spirit, and such a conviction of the truth and divinity of the blessed Scriptures, you cannot

long remain in ignorance of any part of God's will that He has revealed for your salvation. You know the history of man's fall from original holiness, and the image of God: and you willingly own that our first parents deserved the wrath and chastisement of God. But the Scripture tells us also that their guilt descended with their nature to all their offspring, and that therefore every child of sinful Adam is born in sin. Very early in the history of the human race, we are told that 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' And again, 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one.' And there are multitudes of other passages which prove that even since Adam sinned, all his descendants are sinners in the sight of God. The very institution of sacrifices, which were at first ordained by God, and have continued to be offered by all the nations of the earth to their deities, is enough to shew us that man is

unable to satisfy God himself; and that the blood of some victim must be poured out to wash away his guilt. Yet our reason tells us that 'the blood of bulls and goats could never wash away our sins,' and of this we are also assured by God's inspired ministers. The slaughter of the innocent creatures was to remind the sons of Adam that they were guilty, and to tell them that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin:' and it was to fix their minds on the one great Sacrifice for sin that was promised to our first parents when the Lord pronounced their sentence of condemnation. That sacrifice was offered when Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God, poured out His blood upon the cross: and from henceforth 'whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.'"

"But, Marcella, do you mean that by believing in Jesus Christ as your Saviour you are really made perfectly holy, and that the sinful nature of which your Scriptures speak so much, is altogether changed, so as to be free from sin?"

"Far from it, Vivia. Would to God it were so! But even God's holiest servants; even the

THE MARTYRS OF CARTHAGE.

CHAPTER I.

A noble army—men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light arrayed.
They climbed the steep ascent of Heaven,
Through peril, toil, and pain;
Oh God! to us may grace be given
To follow in their train!—HEBER.

THE Roman Empire was in a state of tranquillity, for the victorious troops of Severus had returned from their expedition into Parthia, whither they had been led by their restless and ambitious commander, to subdne a revolt of the inhabitants of that wild country. The campaign had closed by the siege and capture of Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital; and the successful Roman soldiers were permitted for a while to repose in the fertile valleys and luxurious cities of Syria, and to recruit their

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accomplish this plan. He exclaimed, 'I come to do thy will, O God! yea, I am content to do it.' And God's will was, that He should endure the chastisement deserved by man, which no one but a *God* could do; and that He should bear it in the form and nature which had sinned, which no one but a *man* could do. So Christ was God and man; and as such He lived, and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven; and as such He will return again to call His believing people to Himself, and give them a share in the glorious kingdom which He will set up for ever!"

"Marcella, while I listen to you, I cannot help believing all that you so glowingly describe; but the impression fades away when I am with my family, and taking part, as I am often obliged to do, in all the observances of our idolatrous religion. I wish my faith in Christianity was so real and confirmed, that I could have courage to tell them I would have no more to do with idols; but my heart is very weak. I believe that your religion is true, and the more I hear of its doctrines, the more excellent they appear to me, and the more worthy of being revealed by a holy and merciful God.

Yet I shrink from the idea of avowing my faith in them; and even while I ardently desire to be instructed in every point of your faith, I tremble to look forward, and realize the misery that I am preparing for myself. O, Marcella, what would be the feelings of my husband, if he now knew the nature of our constant conversations; and how would he regard me if I were ever to utter the words, 'I am a CHRISTIAN!' My parents, my brothers, my friends, all would cast me off with scorn; and I think I could bear it all, so long as Marcus was unchanged. But to see his altered countenance,—to lose his esteem and affection!—No, Marcella, no!—Speak to me no more of your religion, and your blessed hopes of heaven. You have said enough to destroy my inward peace for ever, but you must not rob me of the dearest treasure I possess on earth,—my husband's love."

"'Whoso loveth husband or wife more than Me, is not worthy of Me,' were Christ's own words, my Vivia," replied Marcella gently, and attempting to take her hand; but Vivia turned away, and burst into tears; then rising hastily, and recovering her composure by a strong

by publishing a second edict, which prohibited the Christians from attending any *illegal* meetings; and as such, all assemblages of the Church of Christ were considered. These decrees were regarded by the heathen provincial governors, and all others in authority, as the signal for an effort at exterminating their detested fellow-subjects; and a system of persecution immediately commenced, which extended far and wide over the Empire, and was attended with circumstances of barbarity and cruelty that have seldom been equalled, even by the pagan foes of Christ. So violent was the rage of the heathen, and so fiercely did the flames of that enmity (which had, for a time, been suppressed, previous to the accession of Severus, now burst forth, that the Christians deemed that the "perilous times," and the "great tribulation," which are prophesied of the "latter days," had actually commenced.

At no place did the fire of persecution burn more intensely than at Alexandria, where, indeed, on this occasion, it commenced. Severus marched from Palestine into Egypt, after his troops were refreshed and recruited, and took

up his abode for some time in this great and flourishing city; and he was not suffered to reside there long without receiving intimation from the enemies of Christ's Church, of the vast concourse of Christian believers that dwelt not only in Alexandria, but also in other Egyptian cities, as well as at Carthage, and throughout the whole of Northern Africa. To check the further increase of their numbers, and also, as we must suppose, to diminish the numbers of those already holding the true faith, Severus appointed Lætus Governor of Alexandria, and shortly afterwards, Aquila;—both of them being men well calculated to carry out his cruel intentions to the uttermost, and even to go far beyond them.

The Emperor then left Egypt, and returned to Rome, to celebrate his victories in the East, while his unhappy and unoffending Christian subjects were left at the mercy of their heathen oppressors. The war being ended, some of the Roman troops were ordered to be disbanded, and allowed to return to their homes; and among these was the band commanded by Marcus Icilius, the son of the noble Fabius, a wealthy and influential citizen of Carthage.

Marcus had distinguished himself in the Parthian campaign, and was now desirous to return home and claim the congratulations of his family and fellow-citizens on the honours which had been conferred upon him. And one there was at Carthage, whose kind greeting and heartfelt joy at his success and safety would be more precious to him than all beside. The lovely and noble Vivia Perpetua, daughter of his father's friend, Horatius, had been his bride but a few short happy months, when he was called away from his home to join the army of Severus. More than four years had elapsed since he left Carthage, and his little daughter, who was born after his departure, was still a stranger to him.

It was therefore with deep feelings of regret and disappointment that Marcus found, after the Emperor had sailed for Rome, that the order for the disbanding of the cohort to which he belonged had been reversed, and that the troops under his command had been placed at the disposal of Aquila, the new governor, and were to remain for a certain time at Alexandria, in order to assist him in executing the intentions of Severus with regard to the Christians of that city.

Marcus was a heathen, and as such he felt a strong hatred to the Christian sect, whose religion he had from infancy been taught to consider as a degrading and impious faith. Yet the young soldier was not cruel by nature, and he had hitherto never been actively or personally engaged in oppressing the disciples of the Nazarene. But such is the influence of example, and so contagious is the excitement which bigotry and party feeling arouse in the unrenewed heart of man, that Marcus soon found himself carried away by the same feelings that actuated all around him, and joining with enthusiasm in the bitter cries for vengeance with which the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus were everywhere pursued. Even the scene of their trials, and torments, and inhuman executions, became ere long not only the place to which his professional duties obliged him to repair, but also the spot where he learnt to experience a keen delight in witnessing the agonies of his innocent fellow-creatures, and joining in the wild, discordant laugh that burst from the savage heathen populace at the groans and struggles which were extorted from the expiring victims. How true is it that "the dark places

of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty!" It ever has been true, and ever will be so, that where the light of the Gospel of mercy and peace has not extended, there the darkness of heathenism is also the abode of cruelty; and, however civilized, however refined men may be, they are yet in their natural state; and that natural state leads them to delight in acts of blood and vengeance whenever their passions are excited to an adequate pitch.

Marcus was an idolater; and when the worst feelings of his nature were roused by evil example, and irritated by false and calumnious reports against the disciples of Christ, he became a violent and bitter persecutor. All the noble and amiable qualities which had distinguished him among his companions, and had won the love of Vivia Perpetua, seemed to forsake him; and a thirst for blood—for Christians' blood—took possession of him. And yet Marcus deemed all the while that he was only actuated by a laudable zeal for the honour of the gods; and his heathen friends and fellow-soldiers applauded his courage and perseverance in seeking out, and bringing to justice, those

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would come from her dear young mistress's intimacy with a Christian maiden. That Horatius should have permitted so dangerous a connection to be renewed, had been a matter of grief and wonder to her, and she had even ventured to express her feelings on the subject to Portia; for though a slave, her long residence in the family, and her faithful and devoted services, had almost given her the privileges of a friend. But Portia did not heed her remonstrances. She was much taken up with the care and management of her husband's large establishment, and in providing for the entertainment of the numerous guests, whom it was his pleasure to receive in his splendid and hospitable mansion; and she had always placed the greatest confidence in her daughter's piety and circumspection of conduct; and since her marriage, she had seldom even attempted to interfere with any of her wishes. She regretted indeed that she secluded herself so entirely from society since the departure of Marcus, and generally declined even joining her father's guests, when the entertainments were of a gay or noisy kind. But Portia respected her daughter's motive, and suffered her

who were even suspected of the crime of worshipping the Nazarene. So thought *Saul of Tarsus;* and he "persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women," until the grace of God overtook him in his evil way, and Jesus called him to become *Paul the Apostle.*

Among the many victims whom Marcus, and his favourite soldier and servant Basilides, were instrumental in discovering and bringing before the bloody tribunal of Aquila, was Leonidas, father of the well-known Origen of Alexandria. This venerable disciple was not to be overcome either by the menaces of the Governor, or the tortures which he inflicted on him, in order to induce him to sacrifice to the gods, or at least to scatter a few grains of incense upon the altar which was placed near his tribunal. The aged Christian firmly refused to compromise his most holy faith by the slightest voluntary act; and Aquila condemned him to be cast into the most loathsome dungeon that could be found in the many prisons of the city. Here he remained for some time, enduring with undaunted patience all the indignities and privations which his inveterate foes could heap upon him: but in

the midst of these bitter trials his spirit was cheered and solaced by the lofty courage and Christian spirit of the youthful Origen, who, as well as his father, had embraced the Gospel of Christ, and was willing to count all things,—wealth, friends, parents, yes, even life itself,—as mere dross, so that he might win Christ, and be found in Him.

In spite of the vigilance with which Marcus caused the prison of Leonidas to be guarded, Origen found means to introduce a letter, containing only these remarkable words—"My father, take care that you do not change your mind on our account." The affectionate son knew well that his father would never deny his Saviour to preserve his life for its own sake; but he feared the effect of his love for his broken-hearted wife and sorrowing children, and he wished him to remember *who* had said, "Whosoever loveth father or mother, or wife, or children *more than me*, is not worthy of me." The devoted youth need not have feared. A few hours after his letter reached the hands of Leonidas, he was led forth, with several other prisoners, to the place of execution, and with them laid down his life for Christ's sake, that

he might receive it again in his Master's kingdom.

The blood of Leonidas and his fellow martyrs did not slake the governor's thirst for vengeance; and his suspicions being excited against Origen, he commanded Marcus to have him diligently watched, and to ascertain whether he was really a member of the Christian church, and as active in making converts as had been reported to him. Both these facts were soon proved, for Origen's boldness in avowing his faith was such, that he seemed to court the honour of martyrdom; and nothing but the care and vigilance of his widowed mother, and her earnest entreaties that he would for her sake conceal himself from those who sought his life, could prevail on him to take those precautions which both reason and religion warrant.

The Lord Jesus gave this exhortation to his disciples, when he forewarned them of the trials and afflictions to which they would be subjected for his name's sake; "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another, for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son

of Man be come." He thus taught his disciples in every age, that although they are by no means to "save their lives" at the expense of denying their faith, they are yet to preserve them by all lawful means; and this, not for their own sakes, but because by so doing they would be enabled to labour yet longer in their Master's service, and carry his Gospel from place to place, whithersoever their enemies might drive them. Acting on this principle the excellent Clement, who was then the teacher of the Christian school at Alexandria, and the ornament of the Church, deemed it expedient to leave the city, and take refuge in a distant part of Cappadocia; but Origen felt and acted differently, and immediately offered himself as his successor. Notwithstanding his youth, for he was then only eighteen years of age, he was appointed to this arduous and responsible office, which he fulfilled with zeal and success. Many of his pupils gave evidence of the purity and strength of the faith in which their youthful teacher had instructed them, by sealing their testimony with their blood.

The rage of Aquila was greatly exasperated by the reports which were continually brought

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to him of the number of converts that Origen made; and he went so far as to direct Marcus to employ a band of soldiers to murder him secretly by night. But this coming to the knowledge of his friends, they obliged him to secure his safety by frequently changing his place of abode, and concealing himself in the dwellings of some of the Christians whose rank or influence as yet preserved them and their families from danger. Still notwithstanding the perils by which he was constantly surrounded, this undaunted disciple continued at intervals to issue from his concealment, and openly show himself at the place of execution, where he attended on the martyrs during their agony, and whispered peace to their departing souls. On more than one occasion he escaped as by a miracle, being stoned by the infuriated populace; and several times on returning from visiting the Christians in prison, which was his constant habit, he was seized and dragged through the city by the mob; and, to appease their rage, he was once even permitted to be stretched on the rack, and put to severe torment, by the cowardly and unjust Prefect Aquila, who would willingly have put him to

death, but dared not do so openly, without a legal accusation. It is said that on one occasion the pagans shaved his head after the manner of their idolatrous priests, and compelled Origen to stand on the steps of the celebrated temple of Serapis, and to present palm branches to the worshippers as they entered. He did so; but instead of uttering the words prescribed to him, he cried in a loud voice, as he gave each waving bough; "Come, receive these palms, not as belonging to your idol, but in honour of Jesus Christ." Thus he confessed the faith, and never was "ashamed of Christ or of his doctrine;" and yet in the midst of savage foes, who thirsted for his destruction, the devoted disciple was preserved. His Lord and Master saw fit to employ him yet awhile longer in his service.

Marcus witnessed the courage of Origen, and the constancy of his martyred pupils and fellow disciples, but his heart remained unmoved by their faith and heroism, and his blind and infatuated soul did not discern the beauty and the divine power of that faith which enabled them to triumph over death in its most appalling form, and made them "more than conquerors

through him that loved them." On his follower, Basilides, the effect was different. He had been no less active and energetic than his young commander, in executing the orders of the Prefect; and Marcus had frequently commended his zeal: but one mournful spectacle touched his better feelings, and the grace of God ripened his compassion and admiration into faith.

Potamenia, a very beautiful slave belonging to one of the wealthy citizens of Alexandria, was dragged before Aquila, and accused by her master of being a Christian, and of having spoken disrespectfully both of the Emperor and the Governor, on account of the severities which were employed against her brethren in the faith. Threats, menaces, and tortures were employed to induce her to deny the charge; and promises of life and favour, as the reward of her compliance, were also tried; but equally in vain. A large cauldron of boiling pitch was then prepared near the hall of judgment, and the Prefect declared that she should be stripped and cast into it, if she persisted in her avowal of Christianity. Death did not terrify the courageous maiden, but the attendant circum-

stances of shame greatly moved her; and she besought Aquila with touching earnestness to spare her such needless suffering. "I conjure you," she exclaimed, "by the life of the Emperor, not to suffer my garments to be taken from me. Torture me if you will; and cause me to be let down gradually into the cauldron in my clothes, and you shall see with what patience and courage I am endued by my Saviour Jesus Christ, of whom you are unhappily ignorant." The Prefect was moved by her entreaties, and granted her this favour. He delivered her to Basilides, who was on guard that day in the judgment hall, and commanded him to lead her to instant execution. Basilides obeyed, but he treated her with kindness and courtesy, and defended her from the insults of the populace; though he could not protect her from the cruel doom that awaited her. She was, according to her own request, let down gradually into the burning pitch; and she died, thanking the soldier for his kindness, and promising that after her departure she would pray to the Lord for him. Her gentleness, her modesty, and her concern for his salvation, made a deep impression on the rugged soldier; and it proved to be

not only deep but permanent. He became a secret disciple of Christ, and a pupil of the devoted Origen; and some little time afterwards, being pressed by some of his comrades to utter a profane oath, in the name of one of their gods, he refused, openly avowing that he was a Christian, and that therefore it was unlawful for him to swear by an idol. His companions at first believed that he was merely jesting with them; but, on his persisting in the same declaration they conducted him to the Prefect, in whose presence he made a full confession of his faith, and was immediately cast into prison. There he remained a short time, during which he was constantly visited by Origen, who administered to him the rite of baptism, and also by other members of the Church: and he was then brought forth and beheaded with an axe.

The barbarous pleasure which Marcus had found in attending the torturing and execution of the Christians was greatly checked by the death of his faithful follower Basilides. He was attached to the brave soldier, who had attended him throughout the whole campaign; and he not only regretted his death, but bitterly deplored the folly and weakness, as he

deemed it, which had led him to adopt the superstitions of the Nazarenes, and to sacrifice his valuable life by avowing his belief in the crucified One. Marcus hated and despised the Christians more than ever; but his heart began to grow sick of the spectacles of blood and agony he was daily called to witness, and he yearned for home, and all the domestic joys he promised himself at Carthage. To divert his mind during his protracted residence at Alexandria, he employed his leisure hours in wandering through the vast and wealthy city, and its suburbs, and gazing with admiration at the wonders of ancient Egyptian art, with which the Ptolemies had embellished its squares and palaces. The lofty and beautiful obelisks of granite that stood so proudly at the entrance to the palace, or temple of the Cæsars, attracted his attention in a peculiar degree, and excited in him a strong desire to explore that strange and mysterious country on the borders of the Nile, whose inhabitants had performed such marvellous works of architecture, and had attained to such a high degree of elaborate art, and stupendous mechanical power; a power which neither the proud Romans, nor any suc-

ceeding nation has ever been able to rival. This desire the ardent young soldier would probably have put into execution as soon as he was freed from his present military bondage, had he not been drawn towards Carthage by an influence yet more powerful than curiosity.

The time for his discharge drew near, and he paid frequent visits to the great port, in the hope of finding some vessel bound to Carthage or Utica, with merchandise, in which he could sail, and thus be saved the fatigue and delay of a long journey by land over the rocky and desert country that lay between Alexandria and the city of his home. Among all the ships that crowded that celebrated port from every commercial town in the empire, he could find none that would be ready to take its departure for Carthage at the time he wished, and at which he had promised his anxious wife, by a letter that he had despatched some weeks before, that he would return. Disappointed and weary, he wandered along the western coast of the harbour, and reached the elevated dyke called the Heptastadium, which united the island of Pharos to the mainland, just as the shades of evening were spreading rapidly

over earth and sea, and the bright flames were kindled in the magnificent lighthouse, that then rose majestically on the island. The effect of the brilliant light, as it played on the rippling water, and illuminated the masts and rigging of the grotesque and varied craft that lay beneath, was so striking and beautiful that it made Marcus forget the flight of time, and crossing the bridges that covered the passages at each end of the dyke, he sat down on a rock at the foot of the lighthouse; and while his eyes were fixed on the lovely scene before him, his mind turned from the sickening horrors, and disappointing cares of the day that was closing in, and reposed on the memory of his beautiful and virtuous wife, and the child in whom he already pictured to himself the image of her mother's charms.

As Marcus passed along the dyke he fancied he heard footsteps at some distance behind him; and again, after he had taken his station on the rock, the same sound of footsteps on the dry shingle caught his ear amid the monotonous murmur of the ebbing tide. He did not, however, regard it; for he neither feared nor anticipated danger; but he was startled

when evening had closed, and the foot of the lofty lighthouse was shrouded in darkness, by the rapid approach of a figure which came from behind the building, and approached within a few feet of the spot where he sat. In a distinct, but evidently a feigned voice, the stranger uttered these words:—

"He is not a wise man who leaves his treasure long unguarded; nor is he a happy man, who returns and finds it stolen from him."

Marcus sprang to his feet and cried,

"Who are you who thus come, like a bird of ill omen, to scare away my pleasant thoughts, and fill me with sad forebodings?"

"The sadder your forebodings the more true," replied the figure in a slow and solemn tone, and forgetting to maintain the voice assumed at first. Marcus started, for there was something in that tone familiar to his ear, and yet he could not recal to his memory when or where he had heard it.

"Who are you?" he repeated with vehemence, "explain these riddles, and tell me what is the danger that menaces me, or those dear to me."

"The danger is very near your home," an-

swered the stranger, again disguising his voice. "And I am one who would warn you to rescue your beloved ones, while yet perchance there may be time. Ask not my name, for I dare not tell it."

"I will know it in spite of yourself," exclaimed the soldier, darting forward towards the shrouded figure, and at the same time drawing his short two-edged sword from its sheath. "I will know it, or you shall pay a heavy penalty for thus dogging my path, and mocking me with dark insinuations."

The stranger sprang nimbly aside, and, favoured by the darkness, escaped the powerful grasp of Marcus; he then fled rapidly towards the bridge, and as he crossed it, he turned his head and cried,—

"Despise not my warning. Return to Carthage with haste."

In another moment his form, which was dimly seen on the bridge, was lost in the gloom that extended round the base of the lighthouse, and again he quickly became visible as he ran along the shore, and the gleaming light from the summit fell brightly on his track. Marcus did not pursue him, for, at the moment, he

was disposed to treat the warning with scorn, as the ill-timed jest of some mischievous youth. But this feeling did not continue. There was something, not only in the voice, but also in the form and action of the stranger, that, even in the gloom, had seemed to him familiar, and associated themselves with Vivia and his home. Could any danger threaten her, and of what nature could that danger be? And who was he who thus, in a strange place, followed him thus secretly, to warn him of evils impending far off at his home? Of Vivia's attachment and constancy to him he could not entertain a doubt; such a doubt would have maddened him; and yet the letters which he had received from her during his residence at Alexandria, had sometimes struck him as being written in a less cheerful tone than he expected; and the joy she expressed at the prospect of their meeting after so long and painful a separation, had more than once appeared to him less unmixed with doubt than he could have desired. It is true, at the time, these misgivings had been slight and transient, and had quickly given way to the happy confidence he felt of being the chief and only object of Vivia's love, even

from her earliest youth: but now the painful feelings returned again, and even with more force and intensity, and the daylight dawned over the opposite point of Lochias, and the watch-fires were extinguished in the tower above his head, before Marcus had left his seat on the silent isle, or decided on the course which he would pursue.

Having thus decided, he hastened to the house of the Prefect, whom he found already risen, and preparing for his almost daily occupation of listening to accusations against the Christians. From the wealthy among them, he extorted large sums of money as a sort of tribute, which was paid, in many instances, by the Christians during this persecution, not only to the government, but also to the informers and soldiers, to purchase permission to celebrate, unmolested, their own forms of worship: but the poorer sort, who had no gold to satisfy the rapacity of their enemies, were condemned to shed their blood in anguish to satiate their vengeance. The soul of Marcus was now occupied with other feelings than those of bigotry and cruel superstition; and, heedless of the crowd who already thronged the chamber

perilous times, to be a watchful guard over the temporal safety and interest of the flock who committed themselves to his care. To lessen the burden of this difficult and responsible duty, the Bishop was assisted by a council of Presbyters, the number of whom was left to his own discretion; and to every one he appointed his peculiar sphere of action, and placed him in a certain station, in which he was to use all his energies to promote the interests of the Church.

The comparative security and tranquillity which the Church had enjoyed for some time previous to the accession of Severus, and during the first few years of his reign, had naturally caused a considerable increase in the numbers of professing believers; but the time was come for putting their professions to the proof, and manifesting openly to God and man who were of the number of true Christians, and who were hypocrites and self-deceivers;—who were "the good wheat," and who "the chaff."

The persecution, which commenced at Alexandria, spread rapidly over the whole of Northern Africa, and Carthage became the scene of similar atrocities to those which were

enacted in the Egyptian capital. Saturninus, the Roman Proconsul of Africa, very soon gave proof that he did not regard the Imperial edict against the making of converts as intended merely to check the further progress of Christianity, without endangering the safety, or interfering with the comfort of those who were already baptized. On the contrary, he made it the pretext for instituting a severe persecution against all who bore the name of Christ, whether old or young, rich or poor; and whether they had been brought up in the obnoxious religion, or were recently converted from heathen idolatry. The security of any church, or of any individual, and the permission to pursue unmolested their own mode of discipline and worship, was now only to be purchased by large sums of money; and for this purpose collections were made in distant countries, where as yet the flames of persecution had not burst forth with violence, and sent by the members of the church to their brethren in the most oppressed and suffering districts:—and none needed this benevolent aid more than the churches of Africa. But the peace and safety thus obtained by the Christians

was neither secure nor permanent. Frequent pretexts were found by the magistrates for breaking through the covenants they had made, and fresh extortions were resorted to until the objects of their hatred and cupidity had sacrificed all their worldly goods, and were obliged either to flee in poverty to some far distant land, or frequently to suffer imprisonment, and even death, as the penalty of their attachment to their faith.

Many such instances occurred at Carthage, and the members of the Church in that city displayed no less constancy and fidelity to their Saviour than had been exhibited by the Alexandrian Christians. Among these was one of the Presbyters named Numidicus. At the very commencement of the persecution his wife Sabina was arrested, and thrown into prison, where she was detained, and subjected to great privations, notwithstanding the efforts of the Presbyter to obtain her release, even if it should be only commuted for the sentence of banishment. Gladly would he and his only daughter, Marcella, have accompanied her to the most barbarous region in the Empire, if thus they could have purchased that life which

was dearer to them than aught on earth beside, their faith only excepted. But while Numidicus laboured eagerly for the release of his beloved wife, he continued to urge her by letters and messages, which he found means to transmit to her from time to time, to "hold fast the profession of her faith without wavering;"—and to "endure even to the end," rather than preserve her valuable life by "denying the Lord who bought her."

Numidicus, though a zealous and devoted Christian, had some friends among the heathen inhabitants of Carthage;—friends who had loved and esteemed him for his noble qualities and amiable disposition, when he, like them, knew of no higher principle than honour, and aimed at no more exalted virtue than morality. Many of his companions and associates had deserted him when, several years previous to the time of which we are speaking, he became a Christian, and openly abjured idolatry; and, in some instances, the regard they had felt for him was changed to hatred and contempt; and the piety and holiness, the purity and self-denial, that were conspicuous in his life and conduct, only served to exasperate their feelings still further.

His noble and wealthy friends, Fabius and Horatius, were not, however, of this number. They both still equally hated and despised his religion, and they wondered how their wise and excellent friend could have suffered himself to have become the dupe and victim of such a degrading superstition as that religion appeared to them. But they could not hate or despise Numidicus. They had known him too long, and too intimately, not to reverence his character, and feel sure that whatever he had done had been from pure conviction. Such feelings, and such appreciation of character, were not uncommon, even among pagans; and they served, in a few solitary instances, to soften the severity of the afflictions that befel the followers of Jesus, and to gild the edge of the dark cloud of tribulation that hung so heavily above their devoted heads.

Fabius was, as we have before mentioned, father to Marcus Icilius, and he was one of the chief magistrates of Carthage. He was highly esteemed for the justice and moderation which he exercised in most of the cases that fell under his jurisdiction; but at the same time he was a severe judge in all questions of

apostasy from the national religion; and showed himself willing to act with the Proconsul in all his efforts to prevent the progress of Christianity, and chastise the obstinacy of those who refused to abjure its tenets and practices. The bitterness of his hatred to the disciples of Christ was greatly aggravated by the fact that he had himself, in his younger days, been convinced of the truth of Christianity. He had connected himself with the church of Carthage; and, after passing satisfactorily through the classes of catechumens, he had even been admitted into the Church by baptism, as being supposed to be a true member of the flock. Unhappily, however, his conversion was not a real one. He had been attracted and interested by the doctrines of Christianity; but their saving influence had not affected his heart; and when "tribulation and persecution arose, because of the word, immediately he was offended." He fell back into heathenism and idolatry; and his apostasy was rewarded by his being placed in a high civil situation, where he employed his newly-acquired power for the ungenerous purpose of persecuting his former friends.

When Fabius had professed himself a Christian, Numidicus was altogether unconnected with the sect, and their friendship had continued undisturbed by the change in his religious principles. But when, many years later, Numidicus also became a convert, and heartily embraced those tenets which his friend had so lightly adopted, and as lightly renounced, Fabius had for some time broken off all intercourse with him. This was deeply regretted by the Presbyter, as he always hoped to be the means of again uniting his apostate friend to the Church; and with this view he had used every means in his power to conciliate him. In this he had succeeded, and their intimacy was renewed, and continued undisturbed till the period of which we are speaking. Still Numidicus made not the slightest progress in bringing his friend to repent of his apostasy, and return to the bosom of that Church which he had so deeply injured. The friendship that he bore to Numidicus did not incline his mind, or soften his heart towards the now hated sect which he had deserted; and it was very rarely that the Presbyter's influence could prevail on him to remit any part of

the heavy fines, or soften any of the cruel sentences which were pronounced by Saturninus, and willingly executed by his inferior magistrate, Fabius.

In the case of Sabina he did indeed relent so far, out of regard to her husband, as to join with Horatius, the father of Vivia, in interceding with the Proconsul that the sentence of death pronounced against her should be commuted for perpetual banishment. But Saturninus was so exasperated at her obduracy, in which he was informed she was encouraged by the Presbyter, that no arguments or entreaties could prevail on him to remit the capital punishment; and Sabina expired at the stake, bearing good testimony to the faithfulness and loving-kindness of Him for whose name's sake she was content to suffer and to die.

Deeply did Numidicus and Marcella lament the death of the blessed martyr; but much did they glory in her constancy, and rejoice in the conviction that her warfare was accomplished for ever, and her spirit was reposing in the presence of her Saviour. To preserve her life they had been willing to go with her into

banishment; but now that she was gone to her rest, no considerations of personal safety could induce the Presbyter to leave the spot where her ashes had been buried by his sympathizing brethren,—the spot where he had first learned to love the name of Christ, and where he and his now sainted wife, and only child, had been baptized into that holy name, and admitted as members of his "little flock."

Marcella's grief at her mother's awful death was so profound, and her dread of the same sad fate overtaking her zealous and self-denying father was so great, that, forgetful of every other tie to Carthage, she urged Numidicus to flee to some safer retreat, and "hide for a little season until the indignation should be overpast." But he was immoveably fixed in his resolution to remain with his brethren at Carthage, and abide the Lord's will, whatever it might be. And soon his high-minded daughter recovered her natural courage, and her trust in God's good providence; and she learned to rejoice in her father's determination, and to share his desire to "spend and be spent" in the service of his Master, and dedicate his life to the endeavour to win souls from the bondage of

heathen superstition, and introduce them to the glorious liberty of Christ.

She soon found an opportunity for the exercise of her Christian feelings of charity and zeal, in the renewed intimacy that sprang up between herself and Vivia Perpetua, the beautiful and amiable wife of the young soldier, Marcus. Since the period of his conversion to Christianity, the Presbyter had carefully kept his daughter from all familiar intercourse with her former pagan associates; and although he retained his friendship for Horatius, he did not suffer Marcella to frequent his house as she had formerly done, or to continue the intimacy with Vivia which had subsisted from their earliest childhood. Numidicus feared the influence of old habits and old associations on the yet unfixed principles of his daughter. But during her mother's imprisonment, and since her dreadful death, Marcella had displayed such firmness and devotion, such love to her Saviour, and attachment to his cause, that the Presbyter felt no fears of her "looking back" to the Sodom from which she had been so graciously rescued, except to rejoice in her own escape, and use all her endeavours to bring others into a like state

of safety. The kind interest which Horatius had felt in the fate of Sabina, and the zeal with which he had seconded all the efforts made by Fabius for her preservation, had also greatly strengthened the affection that Numidicus had so long entertained towards him, and the earnest desire he already felt to be the means of bringing him and his family to the true faith. He therefore no longer forbade the intercourse that had for some years almost entirely ceased between their respective families; he only exhorted his daughter to lose no opportunity of making this renewed intercourse profitable to her friend; and to watch and pray diligently that it might in no way prove injurious to herself.

Gladly did Vivia Perpetua receive the daughter of the Christian Presbyter, when once again she visited her in her father's house. The young matron had returned to the paternal roof when her husband was called to join the army of Severus; and she had continued to reside there, in privacy and seclusion, during the long and irksome period of his absence. Hitherto the care of her little Elva, who was now more than four years old, had been her greatest, and almost her

only pleasure; and she had frequently regretted the circumstances which forbade her seeking consolation in the society of her former friend, Marcella. She had hoped for the speedy return of Marcus, when the news of the successful termination of the Parthian campaign had reached Carthage. But the lengthened stay that the Emperor made in Syria, had again and again disappointed her hopes: and when at last he led his troops into Egypt, and letters arrived from the impatient Marcus to assure her that a few weeks would restore them to each other, she was again doomed to a renewal of suspense and anxiety. Many months elapsed, and still the young centurion was detained amid the scenes of blood and cruelty that polluted the Egyptian capital; and Vivia felt most bitterly how "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

The company and conversation of Marcella were consequently doubly welcome to her during this period of anxiety; and many a long and weary hour was beguiled and cheered to the two sorrowing friends, by talking to each other of their respective griefs. Though Vivia was a pagan, she was not so bigoted as to refuse to listen to the oft-told tale of Sabina's constancy

and sufferings, or to withhold her sympathy from the bereaved, yet uncomplaining daughter. Vivia had known and loved Sabina in the happy years of her childhood and early youth, before religious differences had alienated their respective families; and she deeply regretted that what appeared to her so unworthy a cause, should have deprived Marcella of a beloved parent, and herself, and her mother Portia, of a much valued friend. So she listened patiently while Marcella spoke of the anguish she and her father had endured, and of the bitter struggle they had felt between natural affection and the desire that the cherished wife and mother should honour God in her death, and hold fast the faith which she had embraced.

Vivia had often heard her father and brothers speak of the obstinacy of the heretics, whose deaths they had witnessed since the persecution first broke out in Carthage; and she had wondered how any one could voluntarily go through such trials and agonies, merely for the sake of worshipping one God in particular, instead of giving honour and worship to all the gods in the heathen calendar equally. But while Marcella detailed the progress of her mother's faith,

from the first ray of light that entered her mind, until she was enabled to cast away all vain superstition and idolatry, and to live to Christ, and die for Christ, Vivia felt an emotion of respect for the religion of the Christians that she had never before experienced. She could not deny to herself that there must be something elevating, ennobling, in the faith that produced such undaunted courage, even in females and children; and for which so many had resigned their lives with cheerfulness. She felt a growing desire to be made acquainted with the nature and ground of that hope which inspired the martyrs with joy, even during the agonies of the rack or the stake: and most willing was the devoted Marcella to instruct her friend in all the blessed truths that she had learnt from her father.

But Vivia Perpetua dreaded lest her parents or her brothers should overhear her conversing with Marcella on a subject so obnoxious to all their feelings and prejudices; and on the plea of obtaining exercise and bracing air for herself and her little girl, she frequently led her companion out of the heated city to the north-west coast of the peninsula on which it stood; and

there they seated themselves on some elevated portion of the ruins of ancient Carthage, while Elva played around them, and gathered bright flowers among the scattered monuments of Tyrian splendour.

Even at that time but little remained to tell of the extent and riches of this once celebrated city, except the broken ruins of massy walls and lofty pillars, and the numerous and spacious cisterns by which the dense population of old Carthage were once abundantly supplied with water. The only relic of Tyrian architecture that had been left standing, when the Roman Senate decreed the utter destruction of the city, was the great aqueduct, which still stretched across the plain in solitary grandeur, to remind the passer-by of the wealth and splendour that once overspread the plain, and of the cruelty and barbarism of the Roman conquerors who destroyed it.

In this lonely place, tenanted only by wild birds, and now and then by a skulking wolf that shunned the light of day, did Vivia and Marcella, and their infantine companion, pass hour after hour in earnest conversation; so earnest, that it made the time fly swiftly; and

not unfrequently they so far forgot its progress that Lucretia, Vivia's faithful nurse, would send her son, Rufus, to warn them of the close of evening, and guard them during their way to the dwelling of Horatius, which was situated in the outskirts of Colonia Carthago, or the Roman Carthage.

Little did Horatius, or his wife Portia, suspect that their daughter could find occupation for her mind, and interest for her feelings, during her husband's prolonged absence, in listening to the doctrines of Christianity, as simply stated by her young companion. Had they entertained such a suspicion they would have instantly put a stop to the intimacy so eagerly renewed by both the friends. But their confidence in Vivia's attachment to the religion of her parents and her nation was so great that they apprehended no danger from her intercourse with the Presbyter's daughter; nor did they suppose that a maiden of Marcella's tender age and retiring manners, and who had already suffered so severely from her parents' desertion of their ancient faith, would be disposed to attempt the conversion of a noble matron, such as Vivia, or dare thus to

bring upon herself and her father the indignation and the vengeance of a wealthy and powerful family.

This family consisted of Horatius and his wife, Octavius, their eldest son, Vivia Perpetua, and a younger son, named Julius Satur. Octavius had entered the army while yet very young, and was at present with the cohort to which he belonged, on duty at Rome. He was a noble-hearted young man, and highly endowed with all the courage, and all the heroic virtues that befitted a Roman soldier, and a Roman citizen. Brave, handsome, and intelligent, he was admired by his comrades, and adored by his family. As boys, he and Marcus Icilius had been chosen friends, and the similarity in their dispositions had caused their friendship to ripen with their years. In all the manly and athletic exercises, so much practised by Roman youths, they equally excelled; and seldom failed to bear away the prize of victory when they contended in wrestling or racing with their other companions. Their intimacy had led to the mutual attachment of Marcus and Vivia, and it was with the deepest satisfaction that Octavius had seen his lovely

sister betrothed, and in due time married, to one whom he considered so worthy of her as his valued friend, Marcus.

His brother Julius Satur was several years his junior, being the youngest of the family; and, from his misfortunes, an object of peculiar interest to all. In his infancy he had met with a severe accident, which had greatly injured his health, and rendered him slightly deformed. Being unable to take any part in the active exercises in which his brother and his young companions delighted, he had turned his attention to literary pursuits, and being gifted with excellent abilities, he had made great progress in the learning of those times. The remarkable sweetness of his disposition, which was not in the least degree affected by the constant privations he endured, rendered him peculiarly dear to his family; and his strong and highly-cultivated mind, and sound judgment, made him frequently the guide and counsellor of his wilder-spirited brother, as well as of his elder sister, Vivia.

The attachment of Octavius to his feeble and afflicted brother, was very striking, and very beautiful. Even in the days of his boy-

hood he would leave his favourite sports to attend on Julius, and minister to his wants and wishes; and often when the invalid was more than usually feeble or suffering, the manly arm of his brother supported him to the sea-shore, that he might enjoy the refreshing breezes: and sometimes Octavius might be seen bearing him over the rugged spots that intervened between the new and old cities, with the care and gentleness of a nurse, while Vivia walked beside, carrying books or a lyre, to beguile the sufferings of Julius.

Never did Octavius appear to such advantage as during these hours of self-devotion to his young brother; and Marcella, who, in those happy days, was the constant companion of Vivia, had never forgotten the expression of his fine countenance, or the tone of his manly voice, while he subdued his wild spirits, and endeavoured to soothe the pain, and enter into the pursuits of the afflicted Julius.

Octavius left Carthage before the conversion of Numidicus to Christianity had alienated the younger members of his family from that of the Presbyter, and he had borne away with him the image of the young and gentle Mar-

cella, which no variety of scene or occupation had ever obliterated from his mind. Letters had reached him from his home, telling him of the apostasy of Numidicus, and his appointment to an office in the Christian Church; and he had deeply regretted it, not only on his own account, but on his daughter's also. Again he had heard of the conversion of Sabina, and her dreadful and heroic death; and, lastly, Vivia had conveyed to him the terrible intelligence, that Marcella also was supposed to have become a worshipper of the crucified Nazarene. The truth or the falsehood of this report Vivia was unable to certify, as all intercourse had, at that time, ceased between herself and Marcella, but there was every reason to believe that she had embraced the religion to which her parents were so devoted; and Vivia consequently exhorted her brother to dismiss all recollections of her former friend from his mind.

But when the intimacy between the two young women was again renewed, and all the love that Vivia had entertained for the companion of her youth had returned, and she found in her own heart, a growing interest in the truths and doctrines which once she had held

in such detestation, then she blamed herself for having tried to alienate her brother's affections from Marcella; and, in the next letter which she found an opportunity of dispatching to him at Rome, she expressed her great pleasure in being again permitted to enjoy her beloved friend's society, and her hope that when Octavius returned to Carthage, he would only find her more attractive than ever. Vivia did not tell her brother the secret feeling that inspired this wish. She did not confide to him her hope, almost unacknowledged to herself, that he too would find an interest in hearing Marcella talk of the Saviour she loved so devotedly, and in listening while she repeated the doctrines she had learnt from her father, or while she read passages from a precious little manuscript that Numidicus sometimes confided to her care, and which contained one of the Gospels, and a few of St. Paul's Epistles.

Octavius was surprised at his sister's letter, and quite unable to account for her very rapid change of sentiment and opinion, with regard to her young friend. But correspondence was then a tedious affair, and he might probably have to wait for months, before the anxious

inquiries he desired to make could reach Vivia, and be replied to. He must be left to his impatience and his speculations,—to his fond remembrances of Marcella, and his indignant surprise, that she should lend a willing ear to the fables of the Christians; and we must mark the progress of the truths which had enlightened her once dark mind, in dispelling also the thick veil of heathen superstition, which yet shut out from her friend's spiritual vision a full and saving view of the Sun of Righteousness.

CHAPTER III.

Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.—*Acts* iv. 12.

"MARCELLA!" exclaimed Vivia, after a long and thoughtful pause, as they slowly wandered one day beneath the tamarisk trees that grew in clusters among the ruins of Tyrian Carthage, "Marcella! I cannot banish from my mind your last remark, that if Jesus of Nazareth had been an impostor, as I have always been taught to regard him, he would not have refused the worldly honours that his disciples offered him, and have given himself up to die, when by that death all his false pretensions would have been annihilated. Nor would his followers so boldly have avowed their faith in him, and have spent their lives in proclaiming his name, and have died rather than deny it, if they had not possessed sure and certain convictions that he was able to behold

and reward their fidelity. I confess myself to be such a coward;—I feel such a shrinking from a violent and agonizing death, that no argument you have used to convince me of the divinity and immortality of your God has had such weight with me as this;—that he himself shed his blood voluntarily in confirmation of his pretensions; and that his immediate followers, and a great multitude of his disciples, in later years, have cheerfully laid down their lives in testimony to their faith in his power and Deity."

"I rejoice sincerely, my dear Vivia, if any thing that I have suggested is tending to convince you that Jesus Christ is indeed 'Lord over all, God blessed for ever.' It will be one of the happiest moments of my life, when I hear you confess this great truth, as I feel confident you will, ere long, be constrained to do. But the argument which appears to have impressed your mind so deeply at this moment is not the point that struck me most forcibly when my dear sainted mother led me, step by step, in the path of heavenly truth; or when my father and his friends, the Deacons of our Church, laid before me, in simple language,

the unanswerable arguments for the truth of our holy religion. It was the exquisite and touching beauty of the Redeemer's character—his personal human character, as described by the Evangelists,—that melted my heart, and removed all my prejudices against the religion that he taught. Oh! there is something in the narrative of his daily life,—his works of mercy,—his words of love,—his acts of piety,—his gentleness, his majesty, his calm devotedness to the cause for which he came into the world,—that commands my faith, and calls forth my adoration far more than even his voluntary death. I can conceive an impostor dying to support his assumed character; and we know how many instances have occurred among our own ancestors of voluntary and heroic self-sacrifice, from far less powerful motives. Men,—mere men,—may lay down their lives courageously, even when they are not actuated by religious motives;—but no mere man could live as Jesus lived, and speak as Jesus spake, and act as Jesus acted! Oh no! even the officers who were sent by his enemies to take him, were awed by the serene majesty that dwelt in his words and actions. They returned

to their employers empty-handed, and exclaimed, 'Never MAN spake like *this man!*' They said the truth."

"You are very enthusiastic," replied Vivia, with a faint smile. But she was deeply impressed with her friend's animation, and depth of feeling. "I wish, Marcella, that I could either feel the conviction that you feel, or else that I could forget all you have said to me, and fall back into what you call idolatry. I was happy once in my belief in the existence and superintending government of the gods. I seemed to live in their presence without fear and anxiety; trusting in their protection now, and fully convinced that a virtuous life here would be rewarded by a happy immortality hereafter. But now, all my peace is fled. I hailed the restoration of your society, as that which would cheer my spirits, and divert my thoughts in this lengthened absence of my husband,—and it has done so. While listening to you, I have even ceased, at times, to think of Marcus; and while you have spoken of the heavenly hopes that your religion inspires, I have even been carried above that hope of perfect happiness when he returns, that has for four long years

engrossed my thoughts. But I am not happy now. A deep and anxious feeling has entered my breast, and I cannot shake it off. I must go forward:—I must know all that you know, and I must believe all that you believe, or I shall never be at peace again."

"Dearest Vivia," replied Marcella, "you shall, indeed, know all that I can tell you of the Christian's Lord and the Christian's hope:—and God grant that you may believe it as firmly as I now do! And you shall know more; for I hope to be able to bring my father here some evening, and he will answer your inquiries, and satisfy your doubts far better than I can do; and your mind is so much more powerful than mine, that you will be able to receive and comprehend at once those mysterious points in our doctrines, that I could only be taught slowly, and by degrees. I know, by experience, that the path from errors such as we were both brought up in, to the truth of the Gospel of God, is a painful and difficult one. But you have taken the first steps. You have, by God's grace, been enabled to acknowledge One only and Almighty God, as the object of your worship, instead of the multi-

tude of false and material deities to whom you so lately offered adoration. You now own Jehovah as the Eternal God, in whom we, and all the universe, 'live, and move, and have our being;' and I doubt not, but you will soon feel the power and the divinity of that Revelation, which He has made of Himself to the world in the Holy Scriptures; and you will learn to praise Him for the plan of redemption which He has there set forth to fallen man, and to rejoice in the Redeemer, whom He has bestowed on the whole human race, as *your own* SAVIOUR from merited condemnation and eternal misery."

"But, Marcella, I find it hard to believe that I have merited such condemnation and misery. I have lived an innocent life; and if I have entertained an erroneous faith hitherto, that cannot be imputed to me as sin, for I have only held the doctrines that were taught me as a child;—the doctrines in which our ancestors lived and died, and which my excellent parents now believe to be true. Surely you do not think that they will be condemned to everlasting woe; they who are loved and respected by all who know them for their upright cha-

racters and virtuous conduct! No, Marcella, that can never be! The one supreme God of earth and heaven can never deal so severely with the creatures He has made. His goodness and His justice alike forbid it."

"Alas! Vivia, you still hold one fatal error, and reject one fundamental truth. You believe that all mankind enter the world in a state of innocence and purity; and that they are able, by their own strength, to maintain that innocence, and thus merit the favour of God, and future happiness, unless they forfeit these blessings by some flagrant crime or open impiety. I once felt all this likewise; and it was long before my proud and stubborn heart could be brought to acknowledge and bewail its own corruptions, and its own helplessness. Therefore it was long before I could be made to feel my need of a Saviour, and to perceive the exquisite mercy of God's plan of redemption; and the perfect suitableness of the Saviour whom He has provided, to all my wants and infirmities. But when once the truth of God's Word was impressed by His Spirit on my soul, I saw my own inward vileness, and I felt how hateful I must be in His sight;—in

His sight who tells us that 'He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.' And then, Vivia, I trembled at His wrath;—at His wrath who says again that 'He will by no means clear the guilty.' And oh! what would have become of me under the burden and dread of these convictions, if I had not also been led to the knowledge of a Saviour? How joyfully did I then believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the 'Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!'"

"Dear Marcella," replied Vivia, hesitatingly, "you would carry me on too fast. I have said that I cannot rest in my present troubled, uncertain state of mind; but yet I cannot so quickly follow you to the conclusion at which you have so happily arrived, (for I do feel that it must be happiness to hold the faith that you now entertain so confidently). You must first convince me that I am lost, before I can believe myself saved. You must show me that I am under the wrath of God, before I can see the necessity that His own Son should shed His blood in order to appease that wrath. I do feel much less satisfied with myself, and my own conduct, than I did before I had so much

conversation with you; but yet it appears to me that I am able to leave off all that I now consider to be wrong, and to do all that I judge to be right; and if I do so, why should I fear condemnation?"

"I wish I was more eloquent, Vivia, and that I was also more versed in the Holy Scriptures; and I should have no fear of not being able to answer all your questions, and satisfy all your doubts. May God help me while I try to repeat to you those passages of His word that so plainly declare the natural corruption of the human heart, and its proneness to actual sin; and also the deep guilt of every sort of sin in His sight; even of those sins which we deem to be trifling. But tell me first, dear Vivia, do you still acknowledge the Scriptures, which we Christians hold so sacred, to be indeed the word of God; and, as such, infallible? And are you willing to receive the declarations of that word as the revealed will of Jehovah, to which all His creatures are bound to pay unconditional obedience? You did go thus far with me in our last conversation; and you seemed much impressed with the solemn thought that the Creator of the universe should deign

to communicate His will thus clearly to mankind, and to give a divine rule of conduct to His intelligent creatures."

"Yes, Marcella, I think I am convinced that the Christians' Bible is the inspired word of God. What you have read to me from the Gospels and Epistles, and repeated to me from the Old Testament, as you call it, has been sufficient to show me that the Scriptures are a divine production; and I am willing to be taught by them. Show me, then, that those Scriptures do really declare that such individuals as you and I, and others who appear to me to lead blameless lives, are nevertheless exposed to the wrath of God, and in danger of eternal punishment, and I will believe it. And then, I doubt not, I shall also be ready to look to the merits of another for salvation, and to accept as my Saviour that Jesus whose life and death I acknowledge to have been far above the attainment of mere humanity."

"Then, Vivia," exclaimed Marcella, with joyful animation, "I shall soon hail you as a sister in the faith. With such a teachable spirit, and such a conviction of the truth and divinity of the blessed Scriptures, you cannot

long remain in ignorance of any part of God's will that He has revealed for your salvation. You know the history of man's fall from original holiness, and the image of God: and you willingly own that our first parents deserved the wrath and chastisement of God. But the Scripture tells us also that their guilt descended with their nature to all their offspring, and that therefore every child of sinful Adam is born in sin. Very early in the history of the human race, we are told that 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' And again, 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one.' And there are multitudes of other passages which prove that even since Adam sinned, all his descendants are sinners in the sight of God. The very institution of sacrifices, which were at first ordained by God, and have continued to be offered by all the nations of the earth to their deities, is enough to shew us that man is

unable to satisfy God himself; and that the blood of some victim must be poured out to wash away his guilt. Yet our reason tells us that 'the blood of bulls and goats could never wash away our sins,' and of this we are also assured by God's inspired ministers. The slaughter of the innocent creatures was to remind the sons of Adam that they were guilty, and to tell them that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin:' and it was to fix their minds on the one great Sacrifice for sin that was promised to our first parents when the Lord pronounced their sentence of condemnation. That sacrifice was offered when Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God, poured out His blood upon the cross: and from henceforth 'whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.'"

"But, Marcella, do you mean that by believing in Jesus Christ as your Saviour you are really made perfectly holy, and that the sinful nature of which your Scriptures speak so much, is altogether changed, so as to be free from sin?"

"Far from it, Vivia. Would to God it were so! But even God's holiest servants; even the

apostles of our Lord;—men whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose;—even they felt and complained of the corruption, and the tendency to sin that dwelt in them, long after they were united to Christ by a living faith in his salvation. Sit down on this fallen pillar, and let me read to you the striking words of the great apostle Saint Paul, which will show you what he believed and experienced with regard to this matter." And taking her precious manuscript from her bosom, Marcella read the following passage:

"I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall

deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

"Is it possible, Marcella," replied Vivia, "that these words could express the feelings of such a man as you have described the Apostle Paul to be? Was nót his life spent in serving the Master whom he followed, and in teaching others to believe in Him and serve Him also? And did not he suffer much, and sacrifice much, in consequence of his devotion to Jesus Christ, and his determination to do what he believed to be the will of God? And did he not at last die for the cause of Christ? How then could such a holy, self-denying man assert that he 'could not do good;' and that he was 'brought into captivity to sin?'"

"Dear Vivia, I acknowledge that it does seem almost a contradiction, and yet it is true, that the most holy and devoted servants of God and Christ have always been those who have most earnestly confessed and bewailed their own sinfulness. But the reason of this is plain. In the bright beams of the sun, the slightest stain on a white garment is visible, which would not

be noticed in the shades of evening. So those faults and imperfections—those remainings of natural corruption, and short-comings in duty, which are invisible to the perceptions of one who is in the darkness of ignorance and sin, are clearly discerned by the spiritual sight of him who brings his life to the light of God's Word, and who tries his every action, and word, and thought, and motive, by the pure and holy will of God which is revealed therein. The nearer he approaches to God, and the more he becomes acquainted with His perfect character, as manifested in His Son Jesus Christ, the more he necessarily sees of his own vileness and helplessness as compared with the pattern set before him, and the more he is convinced that in himself he deserves nothing but condemnation."

"I think I understand you," said Vivia; "but how then could St. Paul,—how can any one who has become acquainted with God, ever feel peace? How can they believe that the sin of which they are so painfully conscious, is forgiven by God? And how can Jehovah, who is so pure and holy, admit to His favour beings who, by their own confession, are stained

with sin, and covered with guilt and iniquity?"

"'This is the very point to which I wished to bring you, my dear Vivia. God is holy; and man is unholy by nature. God requires a perfect obedience to all his laws; and man is not only unwilling but unable to pay such obedience. God has said, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die!' and 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them!' and man breaks the law of God by thought, word, and deed continually, and thus his soul becomes worthy of death; and death must atone for his guilt, in order that the truth of God may be vindicated, and His justice satisfied. The temporal death of the sinner is not sufficient; and eternal death, and eternal suffering, are the just reward of rebellion against the Creator and Benefactor of mankind. God, the Father, saw the lost state of His unhappy creatures, and, in His infinite mercy, He devised a plan of salvation, by which 'He could be just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus Christ.' And God, the Son, willingly gave Himself up to live as a man, and die as a man, in order to

now welcomed them with paternal kindness, and laying his hands on their bended heads, he solemnly pronounced a blessing, and uttered a fervent prayer, that they might prove steadfast and consistent followers of Him whose name they were so desirous to bear. Looks and words of kindly interest and greeting met the brother and sister on every side, as they moved to the seats appointed for them, and then the Service for the Sabbath evening commenced.

This service opened with a psalm, which was sung by the whole congregation, with so much feeling and animation, that Vivia's heart swelled within her, and she longed to feel that she might join her sweet voice to those of her brethren in Christ. But ignorance of the inspired words they sang, and diffidence of her own worthiness to unite in chanting the praises of God, kept her silent, and she listened with deep emotion to the swelling notes of her fellow-worshippers, while every now and then, when a pause occurred in the sacred song, her eyes wandered round the assembly, and fell in glad surprise on the familiar faces of some whom she had only known as heathens. Among these were Claudius and Secundulus,

the friends and teachers of her brother, with whose conversion she had already been made acquainted. But there were others whose appearance in that assembly was less expected; these were Felicitas, and her husband Revocatus, both slaves of Vivia's father-in-law, Fabius, and well known to her for their exemplary conduct in their master's household, and their unfailing attention to every duty required of them. Their eyes met those of Vivia, and astonishment was mingled with the respectful joy that beamed in their countenances, at seeing her thus united to them in one service, —the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, which they had found to be "perfect freedom."

The psalmody was followed by portions of the Gospels and Epistles being read by the Bishop and his Presbyters at short intervals, which were employed by the congregation in private prayer. This was performed standing, which was then considered the most suitable posture; and many of the assembly raised their eyes to heaven, and extended their arms in the form of a cross, in order to enliven their recollection of Him whose death had opened to them a way to "the throne of grace."

After this part of the service was concluded, Tertius, one of the deacons, read to the assembly some letters which had been received from the heads of other Christian churches, giving an account of their condition, and, in most instances, of their sufferings and persecutions; and then the younger part of the congregation was divided into classes, to be catechised and instructed by the elders. Vivia and her brother were admitted as catechumens, and the deep attention they gave to the instructions of Numidicus, their appointed teacher, and the piety and intelligence of their replies to the questions addressed to them, gave promise that they would soon be ready for admission to a closer communion with the Church.

The service concluded with a short sermon by the Bishop, and a special prayer, in the name of all the company of believers, for the various classes who were not yet admitted to a full participation in all the privileges of the baptized members; as well as for those penitents, who, after having been baptized, had fallen back into some grievous fault, and were now under the discipline of the Church, until they should be considered fit to be re-admitted

to their forfeited privileges. The congregation then dispersed; and, shrouded by the darkness of night, returned unmolested to their homes. Both Vivia and Julius Satur were deeply moved and impressed by the solemn service in which they had engaged; and they felt how superior was the simple devotion of a Christian assembly, to the gaudy pageantry by which the pagans sought to do honour to their gods of wood and stone. The communion with so many of their fellow-believers tended greatly to strengthen their faith, and their resolutiou to adhere to the path they had chosen, cost what it might.

They warmly expressed these feelings to the Presbyter and his daughter, as they walked together from the old city to the suburbs of the modern one. There they parted, and entered the city by different routes; and the late return of Vivia with her brother excited neither surprise nor remark from her parents, who were satisfied that all was right while she was under the guidance and protection of Julius.

CHAPTER VI.

What sparkles in that lucid flood
  Is water, by gross mortals eyed:
But seen by faith, 'tis blood
  Out of a dear Friend's side.

A few calm words of faith and prayer,
  A few bright drops of holy dew,
Shall work a wonder there
  Earth's charmers never knew.—KEBLE.

DAYS passed rapidly away, and each day found Vivia and Julius better informed in Christian knowledge, and more resolved to be guided by Christian principles. The seclusion in which Vivia had lived ever since her husband's departure, prevented her parents and friends from remarking any change in her mode of life after she became a Christian; and the delicate health of Julius had also rendered his general habits so quiet and sedentary, that no outward alteration was observed in him. Indeed in all things that were innocent and immaterial, the primitive Christians lived much like those

around them, and their religious principles did not require them to abandon their usual occupations and pursuits. Even their former friendships were frequently continued, and their change of opinions and feelings could only be known by the greater diligence and integrity that they exercised in business, and the greater kindness and generosity that they displayed in all the social relations of life. To a certain extent, indeed, the moderation prescribed by the gospel precepts influenced the conduct and manners of those who openly professed Christianity, producing a greater simplicity and plainness in dress, and a greater temperance and sobriety in regard to diet, than were observed by their luxurious heathen neighbours. All superfluous ornaments were dispensed with, and the gay colours so generally used by the higher classes, were commonly exchanged by the spiritually minded Christians for garments of pure white; while the graceful toga with its ample folds, so favourite a garb in those days, was considered, even by the wealthy and distinguished among the disciples, as too costly and splendid for common use, and was generally replaced by the cloak, or pallium, which they

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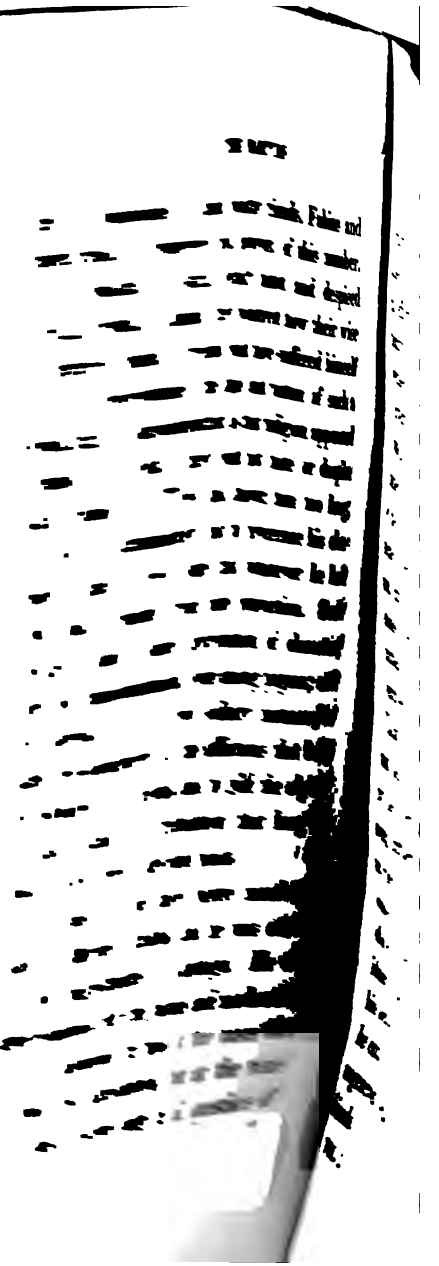
be saved.

KING'S PYON HOUSE, HEREF
DECEMBER 1, 1849



who were present gathered round the young soldier, to listen to his interesting narration, and warmly to applaud his zeal for the national religion, and his resolute conquest of all those natural feelings of compassionate weakness, which might have withheld him from being an actor in such scenes of necessary severity.

Vivia felt sick at heart, and a faintness overspread her frame that nearly threw her into the state of unconsciousness from which she had so lately been recalled. She made, however, a violent effort to subdue her feelings; and rousing all her energies, she rose hastily, and led Elva from the room. She delivered the child to the care of her nurse, and passed on in silence into her oratory. There she sank on her knees before what once had been an altar dedicated to imaginary deities, but which was now consecrated to the worship of the only true God, and Jesus Christ his Son. A flood of tears relieved her bursting heart, and then she poured forth all her sorrows and all her fears into the listening ear of her compassionate God and Saviour, and supplicated for strength to cling to Him, even amid the wreck of all her earthly happiness. She did not pray in

regarded as more suitable to the modesty of their profession. The furniture and decoration of their houses also partook of the same character; and few articles were retained in the dwellings of even the wealthy Christians that could be considered as merely ornamental. Even if their ideas of Christian moderation had not dictated this unusual simplicity, they would have found it difficult to adorn their houses with the costly draperies, the inlaid couches and cabinets, the statues and vases, that were so common in the luxurious habitations of the heathen at that period, without a gross and painful violation of their own most sacred feelings; for almost every such work of art bore on it some symbol of pagan idolatry,—some emblem repugnant to Christian principles. So utterly impossible did the primitive believers find it to escape from these associations with the corrupt faith they had forsaken, that it became customary with them to substitute some spiritual idea for the pagan notion that was originally attached to these emblems. The palm branch, so common an ornament on the furniture and dress of the heathen, and regarded by them as symbolical of victory, and used in honour of

their idols, the Christians adopted as an emblem of the triumph of the cross. The dove, consecrated to Venus, was looked upon as the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The anchor, as the sign of Christian hope, and the lyre, of Christian joy;—while the stag of the hunting goddess, Diana, was easily transformed into the emblem of the believer thirsting after God, so beautifully described by David:—"As panteth the hart for the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O Lord." Thus were the Christians enabled to retain many articles of convenience, and even of ornament, and to avoid offending the prejudices of their acquaintance, while at the same time they banished all idolatrous associations, and substituted ideas more congenial to their own feelings.

The mansion of Horatius was, as we have observed, a large and splendid one, and it was fitted up with every luxury which the wealth and taste of its master could procure; and was frequented by numerous guests, and enlivened by oft-recurring festivities suited to the epicurean taste of the times. In these festivities Vivia had taken little active part since Marcus's departure from Carthage; not because she had

then felt theatrical or gladiatorial exhibitions to be objectionable in themselves, but simply because her heart and her thoughts were with her absent husband, and she found no comfort in such scenes of gaiety. Neither had she, during her temporary widowhood, accustomed herself to wear the ornaments, or dress with the splendour that was considered befitting her rank. Modest and grave, she had appeared among her father's guests, when he desired her presence, and then retired to her private apartments to think of Marcus, to write to him, and to offer up prayers to her favourite deities for his safety and his speedy return. Her little Elva was the only being who had power to dissipate her habitual pensiveness; and the beautiful child was her constant companion. She inherited her mother's intelligence, and depth of feeling; and young, as she was, she could sympathize with Vivia in her sorrow at Marcus's prolonged absence; and often knelt by her side before the altar in her private oratory, and joined her lisping prayers to hers, as she invoked them that were no gods.

When Vivia became a Christian she had little to alter in her outward manner of life to

render it consistent with her new principles, except absenting herself from any scenes of idolatrous worship. The change was in her heart; and that being renewed by the Spirit of God, became gradually purified and exalted in all its desires and motives. Her naturally amiable dispositions, being grafted on Christian principles, became more lovely and more fixed; and in all those points in which she now perceived her own faults and deficiencies, she earnestly strove, by the help of God, to conform her feelings and conduct to His blessed will. Her timidity and fear of suffering gradually gave way to a firm resolution to place herself in the Lord's hands, and in His strength to "fight the good fight of faith;" and even her dread of the displeasure of her family, and of the shame and obloquy that would be the consequence of her declaring herself to be a disciple of Christ, began to fade away before the hope of being permitted to glorify the name of her Redeemer by bearing testimony to His power and His salvation. The last stumbling-block in her way,—and oh! how much the most difficult to surmount!—was her beloved Marcus; —he whose love was all in all to her, and whose

will had ever been her own. Henceforth a barrier would be raised up between their hearts, and they would be reunited only to be divided in affections and interests. It was a bitter thought; and many were the tears that it drew from her eyes, as she knelt by Elva's couch, and wrestled in prayer for her husband, her child, and herself. Could she hope that those so dear to her would ever be united to her in Christ?

The thought vividly presented itself to her mind that more was in her power than merely to pray for them. She must *act;* and trust to God's mercy to crown her efforts with success.

"I have taught my child idolatry," she murmured to herself. "I have guided her steps in the way of fatal error. I have made her kneel before a vain altar, and offer up her infant prayers and praises to the images of demons. And shall I not tell her of the Saviour,—of that blessed Saviour, who said, 'Suffer the *little children* to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven?' Yes, her loving little heart will be drawn towards Him, and I shall have the

joy, amid the many sorrows that I foresee, of hearing her dear lips utter His name with reverence and love."

This resolution and this hope cheered the heavy heart of Vivia, and she rose the following morning eager to begin the sacred task of leading her child to the foot of the cross, and teaching her to seek salvation there. It was an easy task; for little Elva received with readiness and joy all that her mother told her of the "good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep." The story of Christ's birth, and life, and sufferings, and death, and resurrection, was listened to with eager delight by the intelligent child, and joyfully did Vivia answer all the simple questions that she put to her; and many were the deep and heart-searching thoughts that these questions excited within her own breast. She found already the truth of God's promise, that "he that watereth, shall be watered also in his own soul;" for she learnt much herself while trying to instruct her infantine scholar. Her joy at the rapid progress that Elva made in Scriptural knowledge, and in love for the character of Jesus Christ, was a little damped by the reflection that Marcus's

anger towards herself might be heightened by finding that she had also endeavoured to draw away his child from the worship of his gods. But this thought she strove to banish while she reflected on the worth, the countless worth, of Elva's immortal soul; and she trusted that in caring for that priceless jewel she was justified in forgetting every inferior motive. So she persevered in the course of simple instruction she had commenced, and her fondest expectations were more than realized in Elva's spiritual growth.

When Vivia saw how deeply her darling child entered into the glorious truths of the Gospel, she resolved, if possible, that she should be made a member of the Christian Church by baptism, at the same time with herself and Julius. This desire she made known to Numidicus, and, through him, to the Bishop; and she was thankful to find that they both concurred with her as to the propriety and expediency of such a course.

An early day was fixed for this important ceremony; and with deep feelings of reverence did Vivia and her young brother look forward to the sacred rite, which was regarded by the

primitive Christians with sentiments of extraordinary veneration. These feelings, so proper in themselves, were probably greatly heightened by the course of discipline which it was then necessary for all converts to pass through before they could be admitted as actual members of the Church of Christ. In most cases the time of probation was extended to a year, or even two years; and during that lengthened period the converts were scarcely acknowledged as belonging to the Christian Church. They were regarded as occupying the lowest grade of believers, and were treated by the baptized members with kindness and condescension, but were not admitted to the privileges of Christians, or received by their brethren with the customary kiss of peace. The ceremony which raised them to an equality with the higher orders in the Church, and admitted them to all the comforts of Christian society, and the privileges of Christian communion, was naturally held in great estimation, and looked forward to with great impatience.

In Vivia's case this impatience was increased by the desire she felt to make an open profession of Christianity, and unite herself irrevo-

cably to the Church of Christ, before the return of Marcus, that she might thus avoid the severe trial to which her resolution would be put by his entreaties and commands. And the same motive actuated her with regard to Elva, whose baptism, she resolved, with the full consent of the Bishop, should take place at the same time with that of her brother and herself. The child was as well instructed in the truths of the Gospel, as her age and intelligence would admit; and she fully understood that in the approaching rite she and her mother were about to renounce all false gods, and be united to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died to save their souls. She also comprehended the necessity of being silent to Lucretia on the subjects on which her mother so carefully instructed her day by day; and especially with regard to the approaching ceremony of baptism. The devoted old nurse had, therefore, only her own observations and suspicions to guide her; but they were sufficient to arouse all her fears, not only for her mistress, but also for the child, who was as dear to her as if she had been her own. Her restless anxiety for the return of Marcus became almost intolerable;

but knowing something of the customs of the Christians with respect to new converts, she had not an idea of Vivia's becoming a member of the Church before his arrival;—she only feared the influence of her Christian friends becoming more confirmed, and her return to her ancient faith more difficult and painful,—if, indeed, she had really been so infatuated as to renounce it.

The day and hour appointed for the interesting ceremony arrived, and Vivia left her father's house, accompanied by her brother and her child, with the blessed hope that, ere her return, she should be *for ever* united to Him whose name she now gloried in, as that of her only God and Saviour; but likewise with the agonizing reflection that the step she was about to take would separate her, perhaps *for ever* also, from her beloved parents; and, far worse, from him who was dearer to her than father or mother, or any other earthly connection. Full of these absorbing feelings, she walked slowly and silently by the side of Julius, leading the little Elva by the hand, until they were met, and affectionately greeted by the Presbyter and his daughter, at a spot near the entrance

to the subterranean church. They descended and found the congregation assembled, and every thing prepared for the ceremony. A temporary baptistry, which consisted of an enclosure, containing the font, had been erected; and a platform was raised in front of this baptistry, which was visible to the whole assembly.

Numidicus led the converts to the platform, which they ascended; and standing there, with their faces turned towards the west, they pronounced, in an audible voice, the prescribed form of words, by which they publicly renounced the devil and all his works, and declared their fixed resolution henceforth to abandon his service, and to forsake all sinful pleasures and occupations. This was done three times; and then the elect candidates turned towards the east, and thrice repeated a solemn promise and engagement to become Christ's faithful soldiers and servants, and to live in obedience to His holy laws. After this they pronounced the Creed, clause by clause separately, in answer to appropriate questions asked them by the Bishop; thus openly professing their Christian faith. The venerable overseer of the flock of Christ then offered up a fervent prayer that

those about to be baptized might not only receive the outward sign, but also might be made partakers of the inward and spiritual gift of God's grace. He then breathed on them, as a symbol of their receiving the Holy Ghost, and traced on their foreheads the sacred sign of the Cross.

All these preliminaries being completed, Vivia and her child were led by Marcella into the baptistery, and being divested of their upper garments, the Bishop took them by the hand, and plunged them three times into the water, pronouncing each time the names of the three persons in the Godhead. He left them, and Vivia soon followed him, and appeared to the congregation leading her little girl, and both clothed in the snow-white garments which were always put on newly-baptized persons, to denote that they had "crucified the old man, with his affections and lusts, and had put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Vivia Perpetua was renowned throughout Carthage for her singular beauty; but never had she appeared so truly lovely as at that moment, when she came forth from the baptistery, her sweet

countenance slightly flushed with excited feelings, and her eyes beaming with an expression of holy joy and confidence that was almost angelic. She was received by the congregation as one of the family of God, and those who were near her saluted her and little Elva with the holy kiss of peace, and welcomed them as their sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The same forms were repeated with respect to Julius; and the new members of the Church then took their places among the body of the faithful, and were permitted, for the first time, publicly to address God as their "Father," by joining the assembly in the use of the Lord's prayer. They were also, with the exception of Elva, admitted to a full communion with the Church, by partaking in the Supper of the Lord, which had hitherto been a forbidden privilege, although they had, with the other catechumens of a certain class, been frequently present in the Church to witness its celebration.

The "love-feast," which formed so peculiar a feature in the manners of the Primitive Christians, followed these solemn services. Tables were set down the apartment, and the provisions which were brought by the rich, to fur-

nish the simple banquet, were placed on them in order. All classes then sat down together without distinction. No seat of honour was provided even for the Bishop; for on these occasions all were considered as equals, and the poorest or the youngest disciple was placed near the venerable official, or the wealthy professor. During the festival, serious and edifying conversation was carried on by the elders with their more ignorant brethren; a short exhortation was delivered by one of the Presbyters; and after joining in a hymn of praise, the congregation dispersed, and returned to their various dwellings.

The circumstances of the times, and the secrecy which Vivia desired to maintain, with regard to her profession of Christianity, until the return of Marcus, prevented her, and her brother and child, from following the usual practice of newly baptized persons, and wearing their white garments for a week. They clothed themselves in their usual attire before they left the church, and the white robes were inscribed with their names, and preserved by the deacons as memorials of their baptism, ready to be produced as witnesses against them if ever they

should break their solemn engagements, or act inconsistently with their Christian profession.

It was late when Vivia and her brother approached their father's dwelling. They had intended to retire immediately to their several apartments, and thus avoid any interrogations from their parents, which they might have found it embarrassing to answer. But what was their surprise, on entering the court, to perceive an unusual profusion of lights in the house, and a number of persons moving about the open corridors! They had heard of no intention on their father's part of giving an entertainment that evening; but many guests appeared to have assembled; and the sound of the tabret, and lyre, and pipe, showed that the meeting was one of joy.

The cause of this unexpected festivity was soon made known to them; for a joyful acclamation greeted their appearance in the court, where they were evidently watched and waited for; and in another moment Vivia was in the arms of Marcus.

The suddenness of this meeting, so long hoped for, and lately looked forward to with such nervous anxiety, was too much for Vivia's

strength and resolution. She looked into her beloved husband's face as if to realize the blessing of his presence, and faintly murmuring his name, she sank into a state of utter insensibility. He bore her to her apartment, and it was long before the means used for her restoration were successful; but when she opened her eyes they were lighted up with joy as they fell on Marcus kneeling by her couch, and caressing her darling Elva. Every doubt, every fear that she had lately entertained, was obliterated from her mind, and she only felt the overpowering happiness of seeing her husband restored to her in health and safety. Nor was his joy less animated than hers, for he loved his beautiful and amiable wife with a deep and fervent attachment; and if his life had been more active and varied than hers during their long absence, his affection had been as steady and as devoted, and his heart had been as constant as hers could wish.

Marcus had arrived in the port of Carthage that evening; and, hastening immediately to the dwelling of Horatius, he had reached it soon after the departure of Vivia and Julius. As Lucretia knew that her mistress's favourite walk

was among the ruins, and on the sea shore, servants were despatched in that direction, and also to the Presbyter's house, to hasten her return. But their search had proved ineffectual, and the impatient young soldier was just about to leave the friends who had assembled to welcome him, on hearing the report of his arrival, and to go himself in pursuit of his wife, when the shout of the domestics announced to him that she had arrived. It was not long before the party was joined by Fabius, the father of Marcus, whose dwelling was situated at a considerable distance from that of Horatius. He had been summoned by one of the domestics immediately on his son's unexpected arrival, but business of moment had prevented his more speedily obeying the summons, as he was engaged with the Proconsul; and in reply to a question from Horatius, he informed the assembled company that he had been suddenly called to the palace of Saturninus to assist him in examining a stranger, who was suspected of being a Christian teacher from Rome.

The conversation turned on the subject of the numerous conversions to Christianity that had occurred of late in Carthage, and all over

the Empire, and which the edict of Severus had been nominally intended to check; and the strongest feelings of abhorrence were expressed both by Fabius and Horatius, of those who deserted the sacred worship of the immortal gods, and paid adoration to a crucified impostor, who was unable by his arts even to save himself from the just sentence of the law. The magistrate spoke with his usual bitterness of the sect to which he had once attached himself; and while he alluded to Numidicus as the only member of the now-despised faith, with whom he would deign to hold any intercourse, he expressed himself as feeling much surprise that Horatius should have permitted the intimacy between Vivia and the Presbyter's daughter to be renewed, which he had been informed was the case. His friend, who knew less of the power of Christian argument, and was also less prejudiced than Fabius, replied, that he "felt no apprehensions concerning his daughter's fidelity to the religion of her fathers;" and he slightingly remarked that "there was little fear of a young girl like Marcella perverting the mind of one so highly educated, and so accomplished as Vivia; for," he added,

forgetting at the moment that the proud patrician had once professed himself a Christian; "Surely none but weak minds, or wild enthusiastic spirits, are liable to be led away by such fables as constitute the belief of these Christians."

The blood mounted to the lofty brow of Fabius, and his stern countenance expressed his insulted feelings, as he coldly replied,

"Minds that are neither weak nor enthusiastic may yet be deeply interested by the fables of the Christians; though a powerful mind will, no doubt, generally escape from their superstitious belief. Yet this is not always the case; for where will you find a soul of greater power and elevation, than that of our mutual friend, the Presbyter; and, at the same time, where will you find a Christian more entirely devoted to his adopted religion, or more fully convinced of the truth and divinity of its doctrines?"

Horatius felt the error which he had committed, and knew not how to repair it without further offending either the former, or the present prejudices of his friend. He merely observed,

"It is true; Numidicus is a striking instance, among a few others with which I am acquainted, of the influence of new opinions in subjugating even a free and independent spirit. If any man's conduct and arguments could recommend Christianity to me, it would undoubtedly be his. It grieves me to see him remain a slave to such superstitious notions and observances, which I imagine he first imbibed from that unfortunate fanatic, his wife, Sabina; and which he has, of course, instilled into his daughter's mind. But this wholesome edict of our noble Emperor will soon bring many of the heretics to reason; and among them I hope will be the Presbyter, and his amiable but misguided daughter. You know that we expect my eldest son, Octavius, to return shortly from Rome; and if he retains the affection that he evidently felt for Marcella, when he left Carthage, I have little doubt that his influence will soon banish all her attachment to the Nazarean and his followers. I must tell Vivia to prepare her friend for the event, and warn her that, even if Horatius should be so forgetful of his duty to Severus and the gods, as to desire a union with a

Christian maid, I will never consent to such a degrading alliance."

"You need not fear it, Horatius," replied his friend, now restored to good humour. "Your noble boy is too much devoted to his Emperor and his profession, to be in any danger of being so far subdued by the god of love, as to forsake the god of war, as these *peaceable*, or rather these *cowardly* Christians consider it their duty to do. And surely Octavius would never think of taking a wife from their proscribed ranks, unless he was so infatuated as to join those ranks himself."

"That he could never do," exclaimed Horatius. "His warlike spirit could never stoop to hold the pacific opinions, and follow the dull, inactive course of life, that are inculcated by the believers in the Nazarean. As soon should I expect to see your young hero, Marcus, whom I am proud to call my son-in-law, a drivelling disciple of the crucified Jew, as my Octavius. Long may they both continue the objects of our just pride and glory, as they have hitherto been!"

Vivia was seated in a distant part of the spacious apartment, conversing with her hus-

band and Julius, and trying to overcome little Elva's shyness at her first acquaintance with her father. So happily engrossed were the whole party, that the conversation between Fabius and Horatius did not at first attract their attention. At length, Vivia's own name caught her ears; and involuntarily pausing in her animated discourse, she and her companions became aware of the subject that was so earnestly under discussion at the other end of the room.

The sudden paleness that overspread the countenance of Vivia, and the anxious glance with which Julius watched her, would have excited the observation of Marcus, had he not turned towards his father, and risen to join in his conversation with Horatius. What was the agony of his wife at hearing him express the same hatred of Christianity, and of its disciples, that was so deeply felt by the elder speakers! and soon he was engaged in giving a lively description of all that he had witnessed at Alexandria of their obstinacy and their punishment, and boasting of the active part that he had taken in their detection and apprehension. The greater number of the guests

who were present gathered round the young soldier, to listen to his interesting narration, and warmly to applaud his zeal for the national religion, and his resolute conquest of all those natural feelings of compassionate weakness, which might have withheld him from being an actor in such scenes of necessary severity.

Vivia felt sick at heart, and a faintness overspread her frame that nearly threw her into the state of unconsciousness from which she had so lately been recalled. She made, however, a violent effort to subdue her feelings; and rousing all her energies, she rose hastily, and led Elva from the room. She delivered the child to the care of her nurse, and passed on in silence into her oratory. There she sank on her knees before what once had been an altar dedicated to imaginary deities, but which was now consecrated to the worship of the only true God, and Jesus Christ his Son. A flood of tears relieved her bursting heart, and then she poured forth all her sorrows and all her fears into the listening ear of her compassionate God and Saviour, and supplicated for strength to cling to Him, even amid the wreck of all her earthly happiness. She did not pray in

vain;—for who ever uttered the prayer of faith to Him who is the Fountain of all grace and consolation, and was not heard and answered?

Vivia rose from her attitude of supplication calm and resigned, and not without a humble hope that the cup of woe she so much dreaded might yet be removed from her; and also with a strong confidence that if it was her Heavenly Father's will that she should drink it, He would also enable her to endure its bitterness. She returned to the saloon, and, though Marcus observed her paleness, he only attributed it to the excitement caused by his return; and when, at his request, she took her lyre, and sang some of the songs that had charmed his ears in former happy days, he thought he had never seen her look so lovely.

CHAPTER VII.

Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

***Matthew*, x. 32, 33.**

THE following day the family of Horatius were surprised by an early visit from Fabius, whose occupations generally prevented him from seeking the society of his friends until the evening. The object of this unexpected visit was to announce his intention of celebrating the safe and happy return of his son by a splendid festival, and to consult with Horatius and his wife on the best means of doing so in an appropriate manner. The day was fixed, and the games and other festivities that were to enliven it were all arranged, and then Fabius requested a private conference with Portia, to whom he confided his wish of paying an especial compliment to Vivia on the auspicious occasion, and of doing this in a manner which

should be a surprise and gratification to his son. The proud and happy mother concurred with him in the plan which he suggested; and after his departure she hastened to consult with Lucretia and her principal female attendants on the important subject of her own and her daughter's attire, which she determined should be such as to do honour to the intentions of Fabius.

When Lucretia was made acquainted with these intentions, she felt a secret misgiving as to her young mistress's approval of them. But she held her peace; for she hoped that Vivia, in this time of joy and triumph, would forget her conversations with the serious Marcella; and now that happiness was restored to her, that she would return to all her former habits of life, and all her former participation in the pleasures and occupations that befitted her age and rank. She felt also that the scheme which Fabius had devised in honour of his son and daughter-in-law, was such as must bring Vivia to a decision whether she would forsake her country's gods or not; and this decision she doubted not would be such as to remove all her own apprehensions with regard to her mistress's fielity to her religion. She congratulated her-

self on the happy results which she felt confident would attend her successful plan for bringing Marcus home, and proceeded, with zeal and taste, to preside over the construction of her mistress's festival costume.

Meanwhile Vivia's spirit was undergoing a severe and agonizing struggle. Her joy—her overpowering joy—at having her husband's society restored to her, was such that at times she forgot the future, and lived only in the enjoyment of the blissful present. But this welcome oblivion could not long continue to hide the reality of her position, and the perils that encompassed her path; and while she walked by the side of Marcus, and listened to the voice that was ever music in her ears, she sometimes felt a sudden pang as she thought how soon the tones of that dear voice might be altered to her; and the soft glance of that eye, which now looked so affectionately into her's, might be changed for a look of cold contempt,—perhaps of hatred!

O what mighty engines are our best affections to work our good or ill! But the Lord can direct and overrule even the most powerful; and He can bring glory to Himself by enabling

His servants to conquer even those that are most deeply rooted, when they interfere with their duty to Him.

At Portia's request, Marcus and Vivia consented to remain inmates of Horatius's dwelling, until after the celebration of the approaching festival. By that time, their own house would be in readiness for them, as their servants were already busily engaged in preparing it for their reception. Vivia therefore resolved, if possible, to defer the disclosure of her religious sentiments until she should be alone with her husband, when she hoped to be able to disarm his anger, and win him to a calm, dispassionate consideration of the arguments which had been so powerful in convincing her of the truth of Christianity. If this delay was a weakness in her, and prompted by her heart's desire to postpone the evil hour, and to enjoy yet a few more days of happiness, she may well be forgiven.

In the pleasure that Marcus felt at their reunion, he almost forgot the strange circumstances that had hastened his return. But after awhile they returned to his memory; and he began again to wonder at the warning he

had received on the Isle of Pharos. Again he sought, but sought in vain, to account for the stranger's conduct, or divine his motive in thus seeking to inspire him with fears, which, he now felt convinced, were totally without foundation. No danger seemed, even remotely, to threaten his happiness. His lovely wife was well, and her affection for him unaltered. His child was all that a father's heart, or a father's pride, could desire. His family were in health and prosperity; and his welcome to his native city was such, as to satisfy him that his friends were as numerous and as sincere as ever. He resolved to believe that the warning originated in some mistake, or had been given in jest; and, if so, he was thankful for any mistake, or any jest, that had hastened his return to home and all its joys.

It is true there was at times a thoughtful expression in Vivia's countenance, even amounting to dejection, that surprised him; and more than once he observed that a tear rose to her eye, when he spoke of the years of domestic happiness which he hoped now awaited them, as there was no prospect of his services being required by the Emperor. But then he knew

how much she had suffered from his tedious absence, and he attributed her look of sadness to the long period of disappointment she had gone through, and to her natural dread lest such a trial should again be her lot. He did not communicate to her his adventure at Alexandria, but he informed his father of the circumstances; and Fabius was as much at a loss to explain them, or to guess who his pretended friend could be, as himself.

Rufus found means to reach Carthage very soon after the arrival of Marcus, having obtained a passage as a sailor, in a mercantile vessel, to a neighbouring port, from whence he travelled home by land. Once, when Marcus was conversing him, relative to some arrangements that he desired to have made in his own house, some association of ideas seemed to bring the stranger, whom he had seen at Alexandria, to his recollection. But the idea of identifying his faithful servant, Rufus, with that individual, never entered his mind; and the affair remained as inexplicable as ever.

The day appointed for the fête arrived; and Vivia prepared to take her part in the gaieties that were so peculiarly designed for her grati-

fication, and that of her husband; but she did so with a heavy heart; for she much feared that the day could not pass without her being called on to witness, and, perhaps, to take a part in, some idolatrous ceremony. She had seen and consulted with Marcella and her father on the subject, during one of the few leisure hours she had been able to devote to her Christian friends, since the return of Marcus; and, by their advice, she had resolved, if possible, to make no disclosure of her new principles, on that public occasion; but on all indifferent points, to conform to the wishes and customs of her family. More, they hoped, might not be required of her; but should it be otherwise, they prayed that strength and discretion might be accorded to her sufficient to support and guide her.

With a humble and fervent prayer, Vivia commenced that day; and, trusting in the help of God, she was enabled to join her family with cheerful composure. Marcus regarded her with pride and admiration, as she entered the saloon, leading her little Elva, and attired in the richly fringed robe of spotless white, and the embroidered mantle that had been

prepared for her. Her graceful form was encircled by a golden girdle ornamented with precious stones; a gift from her husband on their marriage, but which had never been worn during his absence. Her dark glossy hair was confined by a fillet, also of gold, richly set with gems; and a necklace of the same precious materials adorned her swan-like neck. Gladly would she have dispensed with these ornaments, which were then held to be unsuited to her Christian profession. But she wore them in accordance with her husband's wishes, and she felt that she owed him such obedience on all points that were not sinful.

Portia was also arrayed in all the splendour that was usual on festive occasions, with Roman matrons of wealth and rank; and even little Elva was adorned with elegance and taste, in a richly-embroidered tunic, and sandals worked with pearls, while her sunny curls hung luxuriantly round her shoulders. The flowing togas of the finest white wool, with their graceful and ample folds, and the ornamented girdles of Horatius and his son, and Marcus, bespoke them to be attired for a festive occasion; and soon the gaily-painted carriage, drawn by four spirited

horses, that was to convey the party to the dwelling of Fabius, stood before the marble portico. A number of attendants, both slaves and freed men, surrounded the vehicle, and kept pace with the horses, as they rapidly traversed the city.

The house of the distinguished magistrate was one of the most magnificent in Carthage, and on this festal occasion it was ornamented with elaborate taste and splendour. The vestibule was filled with flowering shrubs and plants, and wreaths of garlands hung from the polished columns, and decorated the entrance-doors, which were of carved cedar, richly gilt. As the porter threw them open to admit the guests, their ears were greeted by the strains of a band of musicians, who were stationed in the inner hall; and Fabius came forth to welcome them, attired in the usual white toga, adorned, as became his dignity, with a rich scarlet border, and the other insignias of his high civil office. He led them to the grand saloon, where a great number of guests were already assembled; and ere long the company were dispersed, in scattered groups, through the luxuriant and highly ornamented gardens and

grounds, to admire the beauty of art and nature that were profusely collected together, and to enjoy the various games and sports that were enacted for their amusement.

Feats of wrestling, foot-racing, and throwing the *discus*, or quoit, were performed by men hired for the occasion; and afterwards many of the young men and boys among the guests amused themselves by trying their skill in the same athletic exercises. Marcus soon gave proof that he had lost none of his activity and prowess during his long absence, and he carried away prize after prize, amid the shouts and congratulations of his friends, who were rejoiced to see him again among them, and to hail him as the hero of the day.

Refreshments of various kinds were amply provided by the liberal and hospitable host, and were tastefully laid out in the numerous grottoes and alcoves that adorned the gardens, and furnished cool retreats from the heat of the mid-day sun. Then the circus and the tennis-court, which formed general appendages to the villas of the wealthy, were resorted to for exercise by the young men of the company, while the ladies found amusement from music

and conversation, in the beautifully furnished saloon as well as in the luxurious bath-room.

Vivia tried to feel cheerful; but the effort was vain, for her heart was sad, and oppressed by a vague feeling of dread; she, however, exerted herself so well, that none but her mother remarked her dejection, and she attributed it to her long habits of retirement, and distaste for public amusements.

At the ninth hour,—the usual time for the chief repast of the day among the Romans,—the guests were summoned together by the sound of trumpets and other martial instruments; and Fabius, taking his lovely daughter-in-law by the hand, led her to the spacious upper room, usually appropriated to such purposes, followed by all the other guests. As the lady to whose honour the feast was especially dedicated, he placed her by himself on the couch at the upper end of the apartment, which was filled with tables, each surrounded on three sides with couches, covered with rich draperies and cushions, and inlaid with ivory and silver. Every table was loaded with delicacies, and numerous slaves waited at the unoccupied side of each to attend on the guests,

and furnish them with wine from the well-filled sideboards, that glittered with cups and vases of silver and of amber, beautifully engraved, and ornamented with figures of the gods, or other symbols of idolatry. On every table were likewise placed images of the *lares*, or deified ancestors of the family, to consecrate the repast, and to these a libation was poured out by the president of each table before the viands were tasted. But previous to the commencement of the entertainment, the slaves presented each guest with a basin of perfumed water, in which they washed their hands, and a fine linen towel, and likewise a *mappa*, or napkin, ornamented with coloured fringes, for use during the repast. So luxuriously refined were these celebrated people in the days of old!

It was with pain and grief that Vivia found herself compelled to witness the idolatrous ceremonies that always attended a feast. She felt as if she was sanctioning the profane rites by her presence and her silence; but as she was not required to take any active part in these observances, she adhered to her former resolution to remain a quiet spectator, and

defer to a more fitting season the disclosure of her own sentiments and opinions. Gladly, very gladly, did she defer the dreaded moment, and earnestly did she lift up her heart to God, in the midst of that scene of heathen gaiety, and pray that that day might pass without her being called upon to confess the name of His only begotten Son as that of her God and Saviour. She doubted,—sadly and fearfully doubted,—her own strength, and she did not yet feel full confidence in the help that is promised to all who "*rest on the Lord!*"

The banquet, which seemed to Vivia unusually prolonged, at length terminated; and again the numerous guests dispersed through the groves and gardens, over which the evening sun shed a fervent glow, lighting up the whole gay scene, and bringing into prominent view the marble statues, and the vases filled with flowers, that crowded every portico, and terrace, and alley. Vivia retreated from the noisy throng of company, and pleading to Portia the fatigue she really felt, she left her mother to watch her little Elva, as she sported with her young companions, and retired into the empty saloon. There, divesting herself of

her embroidered mantle, she threw herself, weary and exhausted, on a gilded couch, and burying her face in her hands, gave vent to her excited feelings in a flood of tears.

"Oh!" she murmured to herself, "would to God that, instead of all this splendour, the humblest cottage was my asylum, so that I might serve my God in peace, and dare to call aloud on the name of my Redeemer! Were but my Marcus a Christian, united to me by the holy bonds of religion as well as the blissful ones of affection, I should be happy, even though my lot were to labour with him in slavery. Look on me, O my God!" she cried;—and rising from the couch, she fell on her knees, and with clasped hands, and upturned face, she gazed through the open portico into the deep blue vault of heaven. "Look on me, O, my God! Pardon my infirmities. Strengthen my weakness; and enable me to glorify Thee, whether it be in sorrow or in joy;—in life or in death. Thy will be done!"

The sound of approaching footsteps, and the ring of merry laughter caught her ears, and warned her to resume her place on the couch, and to dry her glistening eyes. The party,

however, passed by, occupied with their own gay discourse, and took no notice of the only one of that day's guests to whom its varied pleasures had brought no enjoyment. But if Vivia found no pleasure in the gay scene by which she was surrounded, she found rich consolation in the prayer of faith, and the sentiments of humble trust and Christian hope that now filled her breast. She rose from her attitude of supplication with a feeling of peaceful confidence to which she had long been a stranger, and with a firm resolution that no trial or temptation should induce her to deny her Saviour, or, by any voluntary act, cast dishonour on his name. It was well for Vivia that she had been led to seek for strength where only it can be found; for she soon had need of it.

Silent and solitary she sat in that superb saloon; and she communed, undisturbed, with God and her own soul. Marcus was engaged with his father in preparing for the concluding pageant of the day, and supposed that his wife was with her mother and child, and her other female friends, enjoying the fragrant evening breezes that now came refreshingly, after a sultry day, over the flowering shrubs, and

through the thick groves that enclosed the pleasure-grounds of Fabius. The red sun sank behind the western hills, and darkness came rapidly over the scene. But ere the last rays of light departed, the whole garden and the surrounding shrubberies were suddenly illuminated by hundreds of coloured lanterns and brilliant lamps, which had been placed in readiness, and were now lighted by the active attendants who thronged the garden with blazing flambeaux. Still Vivia remained in her quiet retreat, and watched the moon's silvery crescent, as it rose so tranquilly over that gaudy scene, and shed its pale beams on the summits of the trees, and on the lofty marble balustrade that crowned the walls around the gardens of Fabius. She felt the contrast between its pure and heavenly light and the glare that was spread beneath it by the many coloured lamps; and she thought how well it symbolized the peace that cheers and illuminates the Christian's spirit, when he is enabled to soar above the temptations, and excitements, and trials of this mortal and feverish existence.

Suddenly the name of "Vivia" was called

aloud. It was her husband's voice, and she remembered how long she had absented herself from the company, and supposed that Marcus was seeking her in order to conduct her home. Gladly she arose, and went forth into the portico to meet him, for she needed rest, both for her mind and body; and that night she hoped to repose, as it had been arranged she should, beneath her own roof; and the following morning she had resolved that her husband should know the secret that pressed so heavily upon her spirit.

The countenance of Marcus beamed with joy and triumph; and playfully reproaching his lovely wife for thus retiring from a scene that she was formed to adorn, and where all waited her presence with impatience, he led her quickly towards a crowd that was assembled in front of a very beautiful white marble temple, dedicated to the goddess Minerva. Vivia had come so hastily from the saloon that she had forgotten her outer robe or mantle, and her tall and graceful form was seen to great advantage, in her garments of pure white, as she passed through the semicircle of spectators, and entered the area within, leaning on

her husband's arm. She had asked no questions, but her heart beat violently, and her colour came and went, for she felt that a trying hour awaited her. And O, how were her worst fears more than realized when she found herself upon the upper step of the temple, and paused to look around!

Within the temple stood a majestic statue of Minerva, wearing all her insignia as the goddess of war; and on the altar before her lay the sacrificial mallet and knife, and the wine, and incense, and sacred bread, to be used in the intended solemnities; while a priest stood by ready to receive the victim from the hand of Vivia, and offer it to the martial goddess, in her name and that of her husband, in grateful acknowledgment of his safe return. It seemed that the fatal gaze of the Medusa's head that glared on Minerva's shield had indeed exercised the power attributed to it, and turned the bewildered Vivia into stone,—so still, so fixed she stood. But again her eyes glanced wildly round, and the spectacle that now met her gaze at once restored her to consciousness and to agony, for she beheld her child, her Elva, approaching her, adorned with

with her would be freely permitted, and they could keep up an occasional communication between her and her much valued Christian friends.

The attachment of Marcella to the faith of Jesus, which had been a source of such severe disappointment to Octavius, when he was first made acquainted with it, was now a cause for much thankfulness and joy. His steps were unwatched, and he soon turned them towards the well-known dwelling of the Presbyter, where he gladdened his heart, and that of his daughter, by the confession that he held a like faith with themselves, and by assuring them of his sister's constancy and devotion. His visits were oft repeated; and he found that the attachment which he had reason to hope Marcella entertained for him before he left Carthage, was as true and as undiminished as ever. The Christian maiden had, indeed, tried to banish all remembrance of former happy feelings and hopes from her mind; and she had forborne from speaking of Octavius to his sister; for she had no expectation of ever meeting him again, except as members of two opposing faiths, and therefore, as divided from

each other by an impassable barrier. But the knowledge of his being already united to her in religion, removed all her doubts and fears at once, and she frankly confessed that he still possessed the heart which had never known any other object of attachment but himself.

Octavius knew that to ask his parents' consent to his marriage with Marcella would now be useless; nor could he think that their union at such a time would be expedient. But he earnestly desired to possess that right to protect both her and her father, which his betrothal with her would give him; and after some time he overcame the scruples of the Presbyter with regard to the wishes of Horatius and Portia, and obtained his consent to the immediate celebration of that preliminary, but important and binding, rite. In consideration of the peculiar circumstances of the parties, it was arranged that the ceremony should take place as privately as possible, and only the ten witnesses, whose presence was deemed necessary, assembled at the house of Numidicus on the occasion. No festivities were indulged in; but the solemn agreement and covenant was entered into by the bride and bridegroom, and

ratified by the customary gift of a ring, engraved with the emblem of Christian hope, which was placed on the finger of the bride by her affianced husband.

Deeply did Vivia regret her involuntary absence from the interesting ceremony; but it was a source of great satisfaction to her to feel that two beings so justly dear to her, were now irrevocably bound to each other for life; and that the tie of affection, which had hitherto united her to Marcella, was now strengthened by that of sisterhood also. She was thankful, likewise, to feel that her friend had now a protector, who might have power to ward off from her and her father the strokes of persecution which she ever dreaded must, ere long, menace their peace and safety. The right to offer such protection as Octavius could afford them was not secured too soon.

Hitherto the tranquillity in which Numidicus had been permitted to live, notwithstanding his known profession of Christianity, and his official situation in the Christian Church, had been owing to the friendship of Fabius and Horatius, and to there being no proof that he had been instrumental in drawing away any

individuals from the national religion. But the friendship of Fabius was now changed to bitter hate; and even the milder spirit of Horatius was warmly excited to anger, as he regarded Numidicus and his daughter as the chief instruments in bringing about the calamity which had fallen so heavily on his house. He was always averse to cruel measures; but the repeated expostulations of Fabius, and the taunts he threw out, that he suspected him of favouring the new and dangerous opinions, induced him, at length, to give his sanction and countenance to the Presbyter's being denounced before the Proconsul. Horatius hoped that his old friend would only be removed to some distant part of the Empire, and he depended on the power and the will of Fabius to secure him from any personal violence; but he did not not know the malignity of the magistrate's disposition, nor the length to which his thirst for vengeance would carry him.

CHAPTER IX.

Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

Luke xxi. 16, 17.

THE day appointed by Fabius for denouncing the Presbyter arrived; and none knew of the cruel intention except the Proconsul, and Horatius, and Marcus, who in his present exasperated state of feeling had readily consented to do all in his power to bring to justice the man who, he believed, had inflicted on him so fatal an injury. Nor was Marcella's age and sex permitted to secure her from the same violence that threatened her father. As she had doubtless been instigated by Numidicus to use every means in her power to poison and pervert the mind of Vivia, their former friends determined now to punish them together. Horatius and his son-in-law hoped that the disgrace and banishment of her Christian teachers would have

a salutary effect on the mind of Vivia, and bring her to submission. But Fabius thirsted for blood; he wished to obliterate, by present severity, all remembrance of his own former weakness from the minds of his heathen associates, and especially from that of the Proconsul, to whom he looked for a yet higher elevation of rank and dignity. He did not declare his full purpose to his son, or to Horatius; but he engaged them to appear in the judgment-hall at a certain hour, and he undertook that the prisoners, and such other witnesses as he could collect, should then be brought forward.

Unknown to Horatius, whose consent to this part of his plan he rather doubted, Fabius had desired Lucretia to bring her little charge to his house on the morning appointed for the trial, under the pretence of taking the child to walk on the sea-shore. He had previously obtained from the nurse all the information that she could give him relative to the part Numidicus and his daughter had taken in the conversion of her mistress; and he desired, if possible, to have Elva's evidence in court, of the circumstances that occurred on the memorable day when the Presbyter met her mother and Marcella among

the ruins. He found some difficulty in overcoming the shyness with which his grandchild met him, for she well remembered all that had taken place the last time she had visited his dwelling, and his angry voice and stern look were deeply impressed on her mind. At length he succeeded, and after she had played through the house and gardens with her nurse and her grandfather's housekeeper, Felicitas, she talked freely to him, and told him all that she recollected of the Presbyter's words to her mother, and of his prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fabius then tried to persuade her that Numidicus and Marcella were her mother's enemies, and had wilfully caused her all the sorrow she now endured, and had driven Marcus from her; but here he found the child's intelligence too much for his artifices. She persisted that the Presbyter and Marcella were her mother's dearest friends, and that all they had said and done was because they loved her so sincerely: and she added that she wished her father and all her family were like them, for then they would all be happy, and none would be enemies to the others. Fabius concealed his angry, mortified feelings; and he tried another method, which he

had discernment enough to perceive would be more successful. He asked Elva whether she knew that it was her duty always to speak the truth, whether she liked to do so or not?

"Yes," replied the child; "for my mother says that God is the God of truth, and that 'all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire.'"

This was going rather beyond what her grandfather wished to hear, and a deep flush suffused his brow; but he continued gently,

"Very well, Elva; then you will speak the truth when I take you with me to the Proconsul's palace. It is necessary that he should know all that Numidicus said; and it is your duty to answer his questions, as you have answered mine."

Elva looked frightened, and she would have remonstrated against so painful a duty being imposed upon her; but she had always stood in considerable awe of Fabius, and his decided look and manner forbade her from attempting any resistance on the present occasion. Lucretia was summoned, and it was some relief to the

little girl when she found that her nurse was to accompany her to the dreaded presence of the Proconsul, Saturninus.

It chanced on that morning that Octavius had gone to visit one of his former young companions in a part of the city not far removed from the town-hall, which was attached to the palace: and while he conversed with him of all the wonders that he had seen in the "eternal city," his attention was suddenly and painfully attracted by sounds which he had often heard in Rome. "Down with the Christians!—Give us the Christians' blood!" resounded wildly through the street, uttered by hundreds of fierce voices. Octavius and his friend rushed to the window; and, what was the dismay and horror of both at beholding Numidicus and his daughter, with their hands pinioned behind them, rudely dragged forward by some of the Proconsul's known emissaries.

"O God of heaven preserve them, for Christ's sake!" exclaimed Octavius, forgetting in his agony the concealment of his faith which he had imposed upon himself.

Claudius Saturninus,—for it was the Christian youth who had been so instrumental in his

vacant area by the prisoners. The countenance of Horatius was deadly pale, and his eyes were fixed on Julius with an expression of fearful anxiety and surprise, for he little expected to behold his son in such a situation, and still less was he prepared to be his accuser.

He would have spoken. He would have asserted that the presence of Julius was a mistake. But the Proconsul commanded silence; and then inquired for what crime the prisoners were brought before him?

"For the crime of casting dishonour on the gods, and showing disloyalty to the Emperor, by worshipping the crucified malefactor, Jesus of Nazareth!" replied one of the officers who had apprehended them, and who now stood by the side of the Presbyter.

"Who can prove this sacrilege and treason?" again demanded the Proconsul.

"I can," replied the same officer. "I went, at the command of Fabius, to apprehend Numidicus and his daughter; and having bribed one of his servants, with whom I am acquainted, to admit me secretly, I found access to the garden; and silently approaching an alcove, surrounded by trees, from which I heard voices

issuing, I was enabled to hear what passed within. I listened, and no doubt remained on my mind that the voices were those of the worshippers of Jesus; for they all united in prayer to Him, and asked for every blessing from Heaven, 'for the sake of His merits and death.' Then they sang a hymn in His praise; but I cut short their profanation by rushing in upon them, and apprehending them in the name of the noble Fabius."

"Did they resist your warrant?" inquired the Proconsul.

"No," replied the officer. "Numidicus only looked sadly at his daughter, and said, 'The will of the Lord be done!' and then they followed me silently to the house where I had left my men to guard the doors and gates. Numidicus requested permission to retire for a few minutes, with the other prisoners, to his own apartment, and this I allowed him to do. Since then they have had no communication with any one, nor have I heard them address each other, except in a few words of encouragement as we passed along the streets."

With intense anxiety Horatius had listened to this circumstantial relation, and had expected

and the artful wiles by which the Presbyter and his daughter had enticed him into error. Doubtless, he suggested, their object was to draw him into a marriage with Marcella: but the proceedings of that day he trusted would rid the city for ever of their dangerous influence; and then his son would be himself again.

This was almost too much for Octavius to bear in silence; but Claudius checked him, and whispered that the time for him to speak was not yet come. He had learnt from a few hurried expressions of his friend, that Marcella was betrothed to him, and he trusted that this circumstance would be the means of preserving her, if not her father also. But now he feared for Julius; and, being a lawyer, he demanded permission to plead the cause of his friend. It was granted: and so well did he plead, so forcibly did he urge the services of Horatius as a citizen, and the claims of Octavius as a soldier, and the youth and the infirmities of Julius, that Saturninus determined to release him, hoping by this act of clemency to ensure the gratitude of the prisoner, and his future obedience to the laws of the empire. During the speech of Claudius, Fabius had entered the hall, and his sur-

prise at seeing Julius standing as one of the accused Christians, was as great as that of his father had been. The Proconsul referred to him for his approval of the judgment he had pronounced, and Fabius willingly concurred, for he did not desire to inflict any fresh grief on his friend Horatius; and he had always regarded Julius as a visionary, enthusiastic youth, liable to be led astray by any new or exciting opinions.

The release of Julius was accordingly ordered, and by no means well received by the populace. But Horatius requested that he might be sent home under the protection of a proper guard; and unwillingly the youth was led from the hall, uncertain as to the fate of his fellow prisoners. They stood before their judge; Numidicus calm and undaunted as though no danger menaced him; and his daughter, pale indeed, and shrinking from the rude gaze of the soldiers and spectators, but supported by the spirit within, and meekly resigned to her coming fate. Only when she raised her head, and met the eager, piercing glance of her betrothed, could it be seen that her breast heaved with inward emotion, and a tear rose to her eyes.

Again silence was commanded: and again

the witnesses against the prisoners were desired to appear, and proceed with their further evidence. Then Fabius and Horatius both eagerly presented themselves, and the Presbyter saw his two oldest, and, as he had believed, his most faithful friends, combined against him. A deep sigh escaped from his breast; but it was a sigh of pity and sorrow for the blindness and hardness of heart of his accusers, rather than of grief or apprehension on his own account. Both Fabius and Horatius bore witness to the pernicious effects of Vivia's intimacy with the prisoners, and Marcus was called on to confirm the evidence, and to declare the change that had taken place in his wife during his absence, and his belief that it was entirely owing to the arguments,—perhaps indeed to the incantations also,*—of those who now stood before the tribunal.

Claudius again requested and obtained permission to speak; and as the only possible method of averting a legal conviction of the prisoners, he endeavoured to throw a doubt on

* The Christians were frequently accused of practising magical arts on their proselytes; for by no other means could their enemies account for the number of their converts, and their steadfast adherence to their newly-adopted opinions.

the alleged fact that they were answerable for the change either in Vivia or her brother. He did not attempt to disprove that they were Christians; but he contended that the edict of Severus, by right of which alone they could be apprehended, referred only to recent converts, and those who were the known instruments of their conversion; not to those Christians who had been brought up in that faith, or had professed it before the promulgation of the edict, as was the case with both Numidicus and Marcella.

Saturninus listened attentively to the eloquent young pleader, and he hesitated as to the nature of his verdict; for he well knew the worth and respectability of the Presbyter, and he was touched by the youth and the interesting appearance of his daughter, and he would gladly have found a legal pretext for extending mercy to them as well as to Julius. But Fabius saw his wavering look of pity; and he hastened to assure the judge that he had witnesses at hand who could produce proofs,—undeniable proofs,—that the prisoners had made many attempts to convert the wife of his son; and had absolutely induced her to meet them among

the desolate ruins of the ancient city, to listen to their superstitious tales, and even to kneel with them, and worship the Jewish malefactor. Saturninus was grieved; for, if this was proved, he should be compelled to proceed with all the rigour that the law required. He forbore to put any questions to Numidicus, for he well conjectured, from his determined expression of countenance, that he was prepared to confess at least as much, if not more, than could be proved against him by others; and he therefore only motioned to Fabius to bring in his witnesses.

The magistrate retired, and soon re-appeared, leading little Elva by the hand, and followed by Lucretia. A murmur of astonishment and admiration ran through the whole court, as the lovely little creature advanced timidly through the crowd, and stood by the side of her stern grandfather, opposite to the Proconsul. Elva was now about five years old, and she promised, both in beauty and intellect, to equal her mother. Her powers of understanding were beyond her years, and her self-command and energy of spirit, might have shamed many of her seniors on this trying occasion.

"You have a young witness there, Fabius," said the Proconsul, with a look rather expressive of displeasure. But Fabius was too eager to establish the guilt of his former friend to heed the countenance of the judge.

"My lord," he replied, "this child is better able to give evidence than you suppose. She has only to repeat before you what she clearly related to me this morning, and I think no doubt will remain on your mind, as to the source of all the mischief that has brought sorrow on my family, and that of Horatius. Answer me, Elva," and he tried to look kindly and encouragingly at the child. "Tell me whether you did not hear Numidicus teach your mother to pray to him whom the Christians call their Lord Jesus Christ? and did not your mother and Marcella kneel with him on the ground, among the ruins of old Carthage, and worship that same Jesus?"

Elva glanced with tearful eyes at Marcella. She was at a loss to comprehend the strange scene into which she had been introduced; but she felt that some evil was designed towards her friends, and she looked at them earnestly, to discover whether they wished her to reply

or not. Marcella smiled sadly at the sweet innocent child, but she could not speak. The sight of her, and the recollections which rushed to her mind of all that had passed between herself and Vivia almost overpowered her, but the Presbyter replied instantly to Elva's enquiring look.

"Speak the truth, my child," he said. "Tell the Proconsul what you saw and heard. God is listening to you, and you will cause more sorrow to your friends by denying the truth, than by openly declaring that they did teach your dear mother to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and did kneel with her, and pray to Him as their God and Saviour."

"Silence!" exclaimed Saturninus. "I do not desire that you should criminate yourself. It is sufficient that I hear the evidence brought before me, and then give you opportunity to speak in your own defence." Then looking at Elva, he said gently, "Answer your grandfather, my child, and do not fear to speak openly."

Elva looked full in his face; and, while tears ran down her cheeks, she replied,—

"I did often hear Marcella talk to my

mother about Jesus Christ, and once I heard Numidicus do so too; and then my mother said, 'I am a Christian,' and they all knelt down, and prayed to the Lord Jesus."——She paused, and then as if summoning courage to speak, she added, in a faltering voice, and with a heightened colour,—"but that could not be wrong, for my mother says that He is the Son of God,—that He is God himself, and she teaches me to pray to Him every day."

Marcus had watched his child with wondering admiration, while she spoke only of the conduct of the prisoners; and he had drawn back out of her sight, that his presence might not embarrass her; but when she spoke of Vivia instructing her to worship the Christian's God, he feared she might bring trouble on her mother, of a nature that he was not yet sufficiently steeled against her to contemplate with calmness. The same apprehension agitated Horatius, and the husband and father advanced together to put a stop to the child's evidence. Fabius then called Lucretia forward, and she confirmed what Elva had said, by declaring that she had given her the same account, with further particulars, on the very evening of the meeting.

The young Christian advocate had no further ground on which to plead for the release of the accused, and Saturninus saw that he must proceed according to law and custom; he, therefore, appealed to Numidicus for his defence, if he had any to make, against the charges he had heard.

"I have no defence to offer," replied the undaunted Presbyter. "I could not, under any circumstances, deny my own words and actions; and, in this case, I glory in the truth of all that is laid to my charge. I glory in having used my humble efforts to make known the blessed name of my beloved Saviour; and I humbly thank God if I have been permitted to teach one sinful human being to look to the cross of Christ for salvation, and trust in His merits for pardon."

A yell of frantic rage burst from the assembled crowd at this reply, and again the cry, "To the fire with the Christians!" resounded throngh the hall. A deadly paleness overspread the countenance of Marcella, and she looked quickly and anxiously from her father to Octavius, and then raised her eyes to heaven with an expression of earnest supplication; but Numidicus remained perfectly unmoved.

"You hear him, my lord!" cried Fabius, "you hear him confess, not only his own infatuated devotion to the Nazarene, but also his endeavours to delude others to follow the same superstitious and insane doctrines. There is no need of any further witness against him; it only remains to question his daughter; and, doubtless, we shall hear from her lips also that she glories in having betrayed the confidence reposed in her by my noble friend, Horatius, and in having sought to pervert the mind of his child."

Saturninus was excited by the bold avowal which the Presbyter had made of his sentiments and his actions. He was both indignant and astonished; and he resolved to make no more attempts to save a man who had thus exulted in his guilt. But he felt some compassion for the young and gentle maiden, who stood trembling for her father's safety, and seemed regardless of the perilous situation in which she also was placed; and he hoped one victim would satisfy the malevolence of Fabius, and the cruel thirst for Christian blood that possessed the maddened populace.

"I shall forbear to question the maiden," he

replied, "for as she is under age, her actions are not to be considered as independent; and when she is placed under proper instruction and guardianship, I trust she will renounce the pernicious heresies that have brought such miseries on her parents. Remove the male prisoner," he added, turning to the guards who stood behind his chair, "and secure him in the prison appropriated to such offenders." Then regarding the undaunted Christian with a stern glance, he said, "Numidicus, I give you three days to repent of your folly. If, at the end of that period, you are willing to offer sacrifice to the gods, you will be restored to your rank as a Roman citizen. But if, on the contrary, you persist in your present audacious obstinacy, no course will be left to me except to act in conformity with the laws of the empire, and condemn you to expiate your guilt at the stake."

"To the fire with the Christians! To the fire with them both, and without delay!" yelled forth the crowd once more; and, rushing forwards, the boldest seemed about to seize Numidicus and Marcella, and hurry them off to instant execution. But the lictors plied their

fasces, and drove back the assailants, while Saturninus loudly commanded silence. A pause was made, and instantly the sweet but faltering voice of Marcella was heard, and even the savage crowd witheld their cries and execrations, to listen to the expected defence of the Christian maid.

"My lord," she exclaimed with wild eagerness, "do not condemn the innocent, and spare the guilty. If guilt it is to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and to desire above everything that others should love Him too,—then am I most guilty. If a crime it is to tell to others all the Saviour's love to sinners, and all His claims to their gratitude and devotion, and to entreat them to seek salvation in His blood and merits;—then am I a criminal. It was I who first led Vivia Perpetua to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was I who read the holy Gospel to her, and told her all that I knew myself of a Saviour's love and mercy. My father was guiltless of this. He only, at my request, met us once among the ruins, to satisfy Vivia's mind on a point that troubled her. My father deserves no condemnation; lay the punishment on me!"

So rapidly, so eagerly, had the heroic maiden uttered these words, that Numidicus had vainly sought to check her; and Saturninus and all the other auditors were silent with amazement. Now Marcella paused. Pale and breathless, and with her eyes fixed on the Proconsul, she awaited his reply. But her father spoke first; and in a hurried tone, exclaimed;

"Cease, Marcella; cease, I command you! Do not add sorrow to the few days I have yet to live. My course is run. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory;—and I would fix my mind, undisturbed by any earthly thoughts and feelings, on the joys that are prepared for the faithful in the presence of their Lord. But years of happiness and usefulness may be yet your lot; and wherefore should you throw them away voluntarily? Your Saviour does not now demand it of you; for the Proconsul has graciously said that you are pardoned. Come near and kiss me, my child,—my noble child!—and take your proud father's blessing;" he continued with deep emotion. "But make no further effort to reverse the decree of our judge. I am happy if you are spaed."

Marcella turned towards her father a look of anguish, and strove to approach him; but the cord that bound her arms was held firmly by one of the guards. Saturninus, whose heart for once was touched with pity, made a sign to the man to release her, and finding herself free, she sprang to Numidicus, and embraced him with passionate fervour. Then, sinking on her knees before him, she exclaimed in a broken voice:

"Bless me, O my father! Give me your blessing; but command me not to leave you. I am a Christian too; and if I cannot save your precious life, let me die with you. Let me share your prison and your death. Strengthen me with the example of your holy faith, and let me expire with your dying words of hope and trust sounding in my ears!"

There was a pause; for even that savage crowd were moved; and, for a moment, their inveterate hatred of the Christians was changed into admiration for the filial piety and courageous devotion of that young and lovely girl. At length Saturninus was about to speak, and to warn Marcella that she only endangered her own safety without any prospect of saving her

father, whose condemnation was irrevocable, unless he renounced his errors; when Octavius, who had with difficulty been kept silent by his friend, during the progress of the trial, advanced hastily to the spot where Marcella still knelt weeping at her father's feet. He raised her from the ground, and supporting her now fainting form in his arms, he turned towards the judge, and cried in a firm voice,—

"My lord, I claim this maiden as my affianced bride. She is betrothed to me, and therefore I cannot permit her to criminate herself, or endanger her own safety, by acting contrary to my wishes. By your own sentence she is acquitted; and I claim the protection of the court for the bride of a Roman citizen, and a Roman soldier. Let the lictors surround her, my lord, while I bear her to a place of safety."

Octavius saw the necessity for prompt and active measures, for the crowd had recovered from their momentary feelings of pity and admiration; and, now that another expected victim seemed about to be rescued from their malice, a deep murmur of discontent arose, and a movement was made towards the spot where the prisoners stood. The loud, stern voice of

the Proconsul was heard giving his orders to the lictors, and soon a space was cleared. Numidicus was led across the hall to be secured in a solitary dungeon, and his eyes were turned sadly, yet gratefully, towards his unconscious daughter, as Octavius, surrounded by Saturninus's guard, carried her from the judgment-hall.

CHAPTER X.

No! think not I could ever be
  False to my Saviour's honour'd name,
For aught that thou canst offer me—
  A little life—a little fame!—
'Twere weak indeed to lose for them
A never-fading diadem.

Thou hear'st my fixed resolve; and now
  The guards, the rack, the flame prepare
And count me weak and false as thou,
  If I fall back, or tremble there.
Go thou, thy bleeding Lord disown;
Be mine the faithful martyr's crown.

And if one passing pang I feel,
  Deluded man! 'tis felt for thee;
I stand prepared the truth to seal,
  But what shall thy departing be?
Blest Saviour! Lord of earth and heaven,
Oh! be his sins—and mine—forgiven!—DALE.

THE surprise of both Fabius and Horatius at the termination of the trial was great indeed; and great also was the consternation of the latter at hearing his son announce himself the affianced husband of a proscribed Christian maid. He did not desire the death of Mar-

apartments that communicated with it. But one figure passed near him rapidly; and though the face was averted, he thought he recognized Fabius. Immediately afterwards he was conducted to the cabinet of Saturninus; and the suspicions which had arisen in his mind as to the motives of Fabius's visit, were confirmed by the manner in which his request was received by the Proconsul. He absolutely declined making any alteration in the sentence he had pronounced on the Presbyter, and declared that nothing but his entire submission to the laws of the Emperor could preserve him from the stake. To all Horatius's earnest pleadings he replied, that a Christian who was known to be so active and influential ought not to have been left so long at liberty, to taint his fellow-citizens with treason and impiety; and that he considered he had already been too indulgent in promising him a full release in the event of his recantation.

This was a death-blow to all the hopes of Horatius; for he knew the Presbyter too well to entertain the most remote hope of his betraying his principles to save himself from torture or from death. His desire to save the

life of his old and faithful friend was greatly heightened by the conviction that by this means only could he expect to separate Octavius from his daughter; for he was persuaded that the high-minded young man, who had openly claimed his affianced bride at a moment when she was accused of the degrading crime of being a Christian, would never desert her, if she was deprived of the protection of a father. But he saw that all further efforts to move the Proconsul would be vain, and he took his leave, oppressed with anxious care.

On his way towards home he was joined by his son, whom he had not seen since he left the judgment-hall bearing Marcella in his arms. He reproached him with his conduct, and strongly represented to him the sin and folly of which he had been guilty in thus uniting his fate with that of a Christian. But what was his horror and astonishment when the young man calmly replied:

"Father, the very circumstance which causes you to despise and hate my Marcella, is that which decided me to secure her to myself as an inestimable prize. I am a Christian too: and he that would injure her in any way, must

first deprive her of my protecting arm. She is mine; and death alone shall separate us."

Horatius, weary and exhausted as he was already, would have fallen to the ground, but for the strong arm of Octavius, on which he leaned. He groaned heavily, and then murmured in a low voice:

"What! *all*,—all my children followers of the Jewish impostor! All lost to religion and honour! Ye gods! it is too much to bear."

"Oh, my dear father," replied Octavius, "say not so. Would to God you knew the blessedness of believing in Jesus! How heartily would you then thank the Almighty and merciful Jehovah, who has drawn your children out of the sin of idolatry, and given them a sure hope of eternal life and happiness, through the merits and death of their Redeemer!"

"Silence, my son!" cried Horatius impatiently. "Insult me not by such impious wishes. Utter not your blasphemies in my ear; nor talk of idolatry, when you own yourself a worshipper of a crucified malefactor. My heart is bowed down with grief and shame; but fear not that I will denounce you. Oh, no! —may the immortal gods yet give you power to

shake off the vile, grovelling superstitions that have enslaved your noble spirit! But let not Fabius suspect this sad truth. He now believes you to be as pious as you are brave; and do not undeceive him. I cannot trust him now; for all his bitterness against your present faith has returned, and he seems to thirst for Christian blood. I fear for Marcella's safety if she remains in Carthage. Now that she has once been denounced, the populace would be easily excited to accuse her again; and a second time you might not succeed in preserving her from their fury. I do not wish the poor girl to be brought to the stake, for your and Vivia's sake; and I have also known and loved her from a child. Where have you placed her, Octavius?"

"She is now at her father's desolate house," replied the young man. "When she recovered her senses, and the first violent burst of grief at the recollection of her father's situation had subsided, I would have persuaded her to take refuge in the dwelling of one of her Christian friends; but the high-minded girl refused. She would not, she said, endanger the safety of another family by letting it be known that they afforded an asylum to an outcast like

herself. I did not venture to propose your house, my father; for, kind as you are, and have ever been, I could not hope that you and my mother would now receive her."

"You were right, Octavius," answered his father. "Circumstanced as we are at present, I could not allow of any intercourse between your sister and Marcella. Both Fabius and Marcus might justly complain if we suffered Vivia to live under the same roof with the very person who has filled her mind with such fatal errors, as I must ever consider them. You must seek some safe refuge for her at a distance from the city;—perhaps at Utica. In three days her poor father will, doubtless, meet his fate; and meet it as his wife Sabina did; and then Marcella must be removed from hence. I would I could have saved Numidicus! I love him still, notwithstanding all the irreparable injuries that he and his daughter have brought upon my family. Oh! this vile, this pestilent doctrine! Where will its fatal consequences end? It has brought dissension, and misery, and death, wherever it has spread; and now it has come to break up the peace, and ruin the prosperity of my once happy family."

Tears flowed down the old Roman's cheeks as he uttered these words; and Octavius respected his grief too much, and felt too grateful for his kind expressions towards Marcella and her father, to interrupt him. But he thought how exactly Horatius was declaring the truth of the Saviour's own words, and thus proving His divinity, while he inveighed against His holy religion as the cause of family dissensions. He remembered that Jesus had said, "The brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Truly it came to pass in those days as the Lord had prophesied!

It was a sad, but a deeply interesting conversation that was held that night in Vivia's apartment, between her brother and herself. The fate of the unhappy Marcella chiefly occupied their thoughts, and many were the schemes that were devised for securing her safety; and, if possible, for persuading her to leave Carthage before the inevitable execution of her father. Till a late hour the young Christians encouraged

each other by their mutual faith and resolution; and the heart of Vivia swelled with proud exultation while Octavius related to her all the particulars of her child's heroic and truthful conduct. She had heard from little Elva that she had been questioned in the court; and, on interrogating Lucretia, she had learnt how Fabius had compelled the dear child to bear witness against her best and most valued friends. She had also listened to her nurse's angry lamentations that her sweet charge had been so sadly tainted with heresy, and had spoken so boldly to the judge, that it was a mercy she was not torn to pieces by the crowd. But it was only from Octavius that she heard all that Elva had actually said, and the good sense and feeling she had manifested. She felt that her child was even dearer to her than ever: for now she dared to hope that she had "received the truth *in the love of it*;" and that she was indeed a child of God, and an heir of heaven, and would be a fellow-partaker with herself in its unutterable joys through all eternity. Oh, if she could but have hoped that her beloved Marcus would ever be a partaker of the like faith with his noble-minded, but gentle child!

Octavius sought Marcella's sorrowful abode the following morning; and he found her calm, and supported in spirit to a degree that he had not expected. She had passed the night in prayer for her father; and her whole soul had bowed itself unreservedly to the will of God. Nor had she prayed alone. Another Christian heart had sympathised with her's; and other Christian lips had breathed forth earnest and faithful supplications to the Lord of Mercy; not only for the condemned prisoner, who was sleeping calmly in his dungeon, but for her also,—his stricken child, who was wrestling with God for him "with strong crying and tears." Felicitas was with her through that long, sad night; and the faith and piety, the sympathy and kindness of the Christian slave had been the source of much strength and consolation to Marcella.

Felicitas had heard every particular of the trial, and the condemnation of Numidicus, and of the conduct of Octavius in the judgment-hall, from her husband, Revocatus; who was present during the whole of the proceedings, as one of the attendants of Fabius. The confidential situation that Felicitas held in the household of

the magistrate, gave her much liberty and independence of action; and she availed herself of this privilege by hastening to the afflicted and lonely Marcella, who found in her not only a kind and sympathising servant, but a useful and intelligent friend. Both Felicitas and her husband had been Christians from their youth, and they were persons of a very superior class of life to the generality of slaves. They had been captured during the war in Gaul between Severus and Albinus, from whence they were brought to Africa; and sold, according to the common lot of prisoners of war, as slaves to Fabius; in whose service they had now been for several years. Happily the magistrate had remained in ignorance of the nature of their religion, or probably even their zeal and fidelity in the discharge of all the duties of their respective situations, would not have preserved them from the effects of his present hatred towards Christians. They were both highly esteemed in the church of Carthage, and their condition as domestic slaves did not prevent their being treated as friends and brethren by the highest classes among the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus.

It was not in the power of Felicitas to give much time to Marcella during the day; but in the evening, when her household duties were finished, she went to her, and passed the night in watching her when she occasionally fell into a disturbed sleep; and talking to her, and praying with her when she returned to a consciousness of the sore calamity that was impending over her. It was an unspeakable comfort to Octavius, and to his sister Vivia, to know that their unhappy friend was thus cheered and supported by Christian sympathy and friendship, when it was not in their power to afford her the consolation of their own presence: but she had their fervent and constant prayers, and the knowledge of this assisted in supporting her. To every endeavour of Octavius to persuade her to leave Carthage before the period of Numidicus's imprisonment expired, she returned a decided negative. Nothing could induce her to consult her own safety while her father's fate was undecided; and though she had no hope,—we should rather say, no *fear*, that he would preserve his life by betraying his Saviour, yet she sometimes entertained a faint hope that the influence of his friends might yet avail to save

him. She did not know that all the influence of Fabius, who was once his most powerful friend, was now employed for his destruction.

The day appointed for the Presbyter to give his final decision arrived; and when Octavius repaired early to Marcella's dwelling, he found her in a state of calmness that alarmed him. She seemed like a living statue, endued with voice and motion, but devoid of all sensibility; and, in a strangely steady, but unnatural tone, she told him that she was going to the judgment-hall, to hear her father's confession of faith. So resolved was she to go through this trial, and so confident that she could endure it, that it was not without much difficulty, and earnest entreaties, that Octavius succeeded in persuading her to relinquish the design. He promised to bring her a faithful and immediate report of all that took place; and, if possible, to speak to her father, and tell him of her faith and patience, and bring to her his parting message. He then left her to the care of Felicitas, and repaired with a heavy heart to the judgment-hall.

Fabius and Marcus were there already; and Horatius soon after entered the court, and

silently placed himself by the side of his son. The Proconsul took his seat; and, having commanded the prisoner to be brought before him, Numidicus immediately appeared. If imprisonment, and privation, and anxiety for his daughter and his friends, had somewhat blanched his cheek, and reduced his physical strength, they had not dimmed his eye of fire, or quenched the light of faith and hope that kindled there; nor had they prevailed in abating, in the slightest degree, the expression of undaunted resolution and pious confidence that had dwelt on his countenance during his trial and condemnation. Fabius regarded him for a moment, and then his eyes turned to the ground, for he could not meet that open, fearless gaze, unabashed. But Horatius looked at him with pity and admiration, and, approaching him, he tried, in a low voice, to shake the fatal resolve that he read in his fine expressive features. The firm, but gentle, reply of the Presbyter, showed him at once that all his efforts would be fruitless; and, taking his offered hand, (for the prisoner was now unbound,) he pressed it earnestly, and returned to his former position.

The Proconsul now called on Numidicus for his decision, and again declared what would be the sad consequence of his adherence to his profession of Christianity, and what the happy result of his relinquishing his errors, and returning to the true religion.

The court was crowded as usual; but not a sound was heard while Saturninus spoke, and all waited eagerly and silently for the prisoner's reply.

"My lord," he answered in a firm voice, and a calm respectful manner, "when I stood before you in this court, three days ago, I told you that I was a Christian, and, as such, I could not deny any of the charges brought against me. Those three days of solitary confinement have not changed my faith. I still believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as my God and only Saviour. I believe that His blood has cleansed my soul from all its guilt and pollution in the sight of Jehovah; and that His infinite merits have purchased for me a throne of glory, and a crown that fadeth not away, in the kingdom of heaven. Would you have me renounce all these glorious hopes, and blessed privileges, by denying Him who died for me?

—And for what?—To add a few days, or years, to my life on earth! No, Saturninus, no! Lead me to the stake, and dismiss my spirit to the presence of my Redeemer and my God!"

The yells and execrations of the populace that burst forth as Numidicus ceased to speak, for a time prevented the Proconsul from addressing the prisoner; but when silence was restored, he spoke thus:—

"Numidicus, I do not ask you to deny any belief that you may entertain in your own breast; all I demand, in order to your liberation, is that you should scatter a few grains of incense on that altar, which is placed near the entrance of the hall for this purpose. You need perform no act of worship. You need utter nothing dishonouring to your own deity. You have but to comply with the slight form that I have named, and you leave this hall free."

Ere Numidicus could reply Horatius was again at his side, pleading earnestly and affectionately with him to preserve his life, now that it could be done at so little cost, even to his scrupulous feelings. He spoke of Marcella's grief,—he spoke of his value to his friends,—

he besought him by every argument he could suggest, not to cast away the offered boon of life and pardon, when even his own religious belief could not demand it of him. But the faithful Christian was proof against all his sophistry. He well knew how the great enemy of souls contrives to adapt his temptations to the circumstances and feelings of his desired victims; and he knew how many professing Christians had already been beguiled into a virtual denial of their Lord, by the cunning way in which the trial of their faith had been conducted, by those who desired their apostasy even more than their blood. But he knew also, that "with every temptation the Lord makes a way to escape, that His people may be able to bear it," and to Him he looked for strength in this trying hour.

"Tempt me not, my friend," he replied to Horatius. "Play not the part of Satan, in seeking to draw me back unto perdition. Already I am on the verge of eternity; and I behold by faith the joys and the glories of that state to which ere long I shall be admitted. Why endeavour to detain me here, where all is mixed with sorrow and anxiety; and rob me

of felicity such as 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive?'" Then turning to the Proconsul, who listened with intense interest to his conversation with Horatius, he continued,—"I have no more to say, my lord. My decision is made, and you have only to fulfil your duty by acting in obedience to the laws of the Emperor."

The rage and malignity of Fabius, *the apostate*, were roused to their highest pitch by the calm and dignified conduct of the Presbyter; and his conscience smote him painfully while the prisoner spoke with such assurance of the joys that awaited the faithful, and the eternal loss that would be the consequence of any treachery to his Redeemer. The very spirit of envy and malice that instigated Satan to attempt the ruin of our first parents in Paradise, seemed to take possession of the soul of the renegade. He had forfeited all the hopes that once seemed precious to his own soul; and it galled his excited spirit to see his former friend display a steadfastness so different to his own weak, wavering conduct.

He approached the judge; and, as if with a

hope of saving the life of Numidicus, he suggested, in a low voice, that the prisoner should be tried by the rack, which he felt sure would subdue his constancy, and bring him to compliance. The Proconsul sincerely desired to rescue Numidicus from the awful fate that threatened him, for he highly respected his character; and the conduct and appearance of his daughter on the day of their trial had greatly interested him. He also hoped that the agonies of the rack might be effectual in this case, as he had so often found them on former occasions, in forcing from the wretched victim a verbal renunciation of the proscribed faith, or at least bring him to comply with the required idolatrous ceremony. He therefore gave orders for the immediate introduction of the infernal instrument into the hall; and he informed the prisoner of his wish to save his life if possible, and his determination that so good a citizen should not be sacrificed until every means had been tried to bring him to reason.

Did the human flesh of Numidicus slightly quiver, and did his colour change, as the tremendous apparatus of torture was borne by

several guards into the hall, and placed with a heavy, clanging sound, on the pavement between himself and his judge? If it was so, the natural weakness was so momentary as not to be perceived by those who watched him with anxious attention, and who either hoped or feared that he would purchase exemption from agony by complying with the Proconsul's demand. In order to appal the spirit of the prisoner, instrument after instrument was brought by the executioners from the dungeon beneath the hall, which contained an infinite variety of engines, contrived with all the ingenuity that the most refined malice could suggest, to inflict torments that should rack every nerve in the victim's frame, but should not kill. Such was the object of torture; and such the purpose for which the civil magistrates frequently offered rich rewards to the inventors of new engines. They generally professed a desire not to deprive the empire of the services of the multitudes who professed themselves to be Christians, but rather to win them back by promises, or scare them back by tortures, as trophies to the honour of Paganism, and as obedient subjects to the Emperor. The utmost care was therefore taken

to proportion the degree of anguish to the strength of the sufferers, to recover them when they fainted, and to withhold from them, as long as possible, the crown of martyrdom for which they longed.

The chains that hung from the rack were adjusted,—the wheels and straps put in readiness; and again Saturninus, in a voice of entreaty, demanded of the prisoner whether he would receive in his hands the grains of incense that Horatius eagerly held before him, and cast them on the embers that burned on the altar ready to consume them, or whether he must command the executioners to proceed with their dreadful duty?

The heart of Octavius beat high,—the generous blood mounted to his temples; and he was ready to rush forward, and madly attempt the forcible rescue of the revered Presbyter. But Numidicus saw his agitation; and, fearing he would commit himself by some rash act, he looked at him fixedly, and murmured the name of "Marcella." It was enough. The young soldier remembered that he was now her only protector, and that to call on himself the anger and suspicion of either the judge or Fabius

would be to aggravate her misery, and endanger her safety, without a prospect of delivering her father from his threatened fate. He turned away, sick at heart; and he would have left the hall, but that he felt it would be a desertion of his father-in-law; and he had promised to carry to Marcella a faithful report of all his words and actions. How should he tell her that her beloved parent had been called to endure the agonies of the rack?

Numidicus watched his expressive countenance for a moment, and a tear of love and gratitude rose to his eye; and he inwardly thanked his God, who had so mercifully provided such a guardian for his dear, his orphan child. Then he turned towards the Proconsul, and replied firmly; "I have already declared my decision; and I cannot alter it. The Saviour, who has promised 'to be with me, even in death,' will also be with me in agony. He bore greater anguish for me, than it is in the power of any mere man to inflict: and shall not I endure suffering for His sake? Delay not; for, in His strength, I am ready!"

Instantly the savage executioners seized the unresisting Presbyter, and stretched him on

the rack. They bound his hands and feet to the wheels, and fastened his body to the engine with an iron chain; and then they stood, each holding a handle, by which the infernal machine was to be worked; and waited for the signal of the judge. He hesitated; and Horatius, falling on his knees beside his friend, once more besought him, with tears and passionate entreaties, to submit while yet there was time to do so. The mild eyes of the Presbyter, which had been closed in prayer, opened on his wretched friend, with a look of affectionate pity; and he gently replied, "Go, Horatius; this is no scene for you. Your grief may unman me; but, by the grace of God, it shall not move me. Go, I beseech you!"

"Then say you forgive me!" cried Horatius, in bitter anguish of spirit. "Say that you leave this world, for which you are too good, with no feeling of enmity towards me, for the part I have taken in your prosecution. I never deemed that it would come to this."

"I forgive you, my friend," replied the martyr, "as freely as I hope to be forgiven. I know that I have been the means of inflicting

what you feel to be a heavy injury on your family; and I also ask your forgiveness. Can you grant it me, Horatius?"

"I can:—I do!" cried Horatius. And he kissed the brow of Numidicus. Then, rising from his knees, he rushed out of the court, unable any longer to restrain his feelings of grief and repentance.

"Do your duty," said Saturninus to the executioners, in a solemn voice.

The wheels turned slowly round; and a cold sweat stood on the convulsed features of the sufferer: but no cry, no groan, escaped from his lips.

"Loose him!" cried the judge;—and the wrenched limbs fell back into their sockets, with an audible sound; and the shock deprived the Presbyter of consciousness.

"Remove him from the engine, and give him wine."

The judge was instantly obeyed, and the fainting form of the victim was unloosed, and laid on the ground. Octavius could no longer remain in the position he had taken. He approached Numidicus; and, kneeling by his side, he took his hand, hoping to find that the

pulse had ceased to beat, and that the noble heart of his friend was at rest for ever. But, no. The means employed recalled his suspended faculties; and, with a deep-drawn sigh, he opened his eyes, and fixed them, with a faint smile, on Octavius.

"Ha! I am still alive!" he said. "I would the struggle were over. But God's will be done!"

"Will you now submit?" cried Saturninus. "Raise him, guards," he continued, "and place him on a seat."

They did so; and the pale countenance of the Presbyter was confronted to that of his judge, and to that also of his far more cruel accuser: but they could read in it no signs of a shaken resolution. Fabius whispered to the Proconsul to repeat the torture, and give the wretch one more chance of repentance.

"Answer me yet again," said Saturninus, to the prisoner. "Will you obey; or will you endure a second, and a severer trial?"

"I am a Christian!" replied Numidicus. "I will never be an apostate!" And he opened the folds of his robe, and drew out a white

garment, on which was inscribed the name of Fabius. "Fabius!" he cried; "behold this spotless garment; the badge of our pure faith, and the witness against you, that you once professed that faith, and then basely renounced it! By this symbol, I call on you to repent and return. By Him, whom you now persecute, in the persons of His suffering members, I invite you to abjure once more the idolatry which you have again professed; and to seek a refuge for your unhappy soul, in the arms of Christ's mercy. They are still open to receive you. He still waiteth to be gracious. Do this, Fabius, and the friendship, which has been so rudely interrupted between us, may yet be renewed, in the presence of our mutual Saviour."

No words could express the rage that burned in the eyes of Fabius, and boiled in his heart, at this public announcement of his professed faith, and subsequent apostasy. He gnashed his teeth, and looked as if he would have flown upon the object of his fury. But, restraining his feelings, he endeavoured to regard his victim with contemptuous scorn, and only urged the Proconsul to command a repetition of the

torture, and bring the disgraceful scene to a conclusion.*

But Saturninus refused. He saw that no agonies would bring the undaunted Christian to submission, and he was unwilling to inflict upon him unnecessary sufferings.

"Bear him to the stake!" he cried. And instantly he was seized; his half-dislocated arms were bound tightly behind his back, and he was dragged to the entrance, and placed upon a car that stood there in readiness. To his surprise, he beheld a number of other prisoners, some on foot, and others who, like himself, had been deprived of the power of walking, in cars; all ranged in order, and about to be conducted to the place of execution. These Christians had been accused at different times, and had suffered various degrees of imprisonment and torture; but all had proved themselves faithful to their Saviour, and all were condemned to suffer death at the stake in company with Numidicus. To most of them he was personally known, and an

* This anecdote is authentic. It was thus that one of the Carthaginian martyrs endeavoured to recal his apostate persecutor to a recollection of his broken vows, and to repentance for his present opposition to Christ and his cause.

exulting shout burst from the lips of the whole party, as they beheld their beloved pastor borne from the hall, and laid upon the car. They had been aware that their march towards the field of death was only retarded until his final decision was pronounced; and, though they had entertained but little doubt as to his steadfastness, yet they could not restrain the expression of their joy at his manifest victory over all the snares and temptations to which he had been subjected. He smiled his greeting and his thanks; and the cavalcade moved on towards the appointed place of execution, followed by the delighted populace, and assailed by their curses, and their loud discordant cry, "To the fire with the Christians!"

CHAPTER XI.

"Where am I? Whither are ye fled?
Fair visions of celestial light,
That seemed to hover o'er my head—
Oh! bear me with you in your flight.
Can this be earth,—and must I deem
'Twas all an unsubstantial dream?
'Tis strange,—light faded from mine eye,
And on my brow such darkness fell
As none have ever lived to tell;
That dark mysterious agony
Which throbs—and man has ceased to be:—
The frame is clay—the soul is free.
I deemed this change had passed on me,
And my light spirit soared on high,
I know not where:—from memory
All passed with life's returning breath;
Yet still I feel, if such be death,
'Tis blessedness to die!"—DALE.

OCTAVIUS also followed the sad procession. He had endured the worst when he had stood by, and seen Numidicus stretched on the rack: and now he resolved not to lose sight of him until his victorious spirit was dismissed to its place of rest. They passed through

several streets, and he discovered, to his sorrow and dismay, that their way led through the square into which the entrance to Numidicus's dwelling opened; and he feared lest his daughter should hear and understand the nature of the passing tumult. He was about to intreat the officers in command of the procession to lead it by a different route, when his intention was arrested by the sight of Marcella coming forth from her father's gate, supported by the arm of Felicitas. She had, at his request, abandoned her wild scheme of repairing to the judgment-hall: but she knew that her revered and dearly-loved parent would never abjure his faith. She knew that that day would be his last: and she resolved to look upon his dear face once more on earth. She had, therefore, commanded one of her slaves to wait at the entrance of the town-hall, and to hasten to her as soon as he should learn from the shouts of the populace, that her father's fate was sealed, and he was about to commence his last earthly journey. She ascertained the course that the procession was to take; and, strong in filial affection, she took her stand at the gate to wait its appearance.

With one glance she recognized her father, pale and attenuated as he was, and supported in the car by an attendant. She was prepared for his death.—She was prepared to bid him a long farewell.—But she was not prepared to see him thus; and with difficulty she suppressed a shriek of anguish, as she thought of the sufferings to which he had evidently been so lately subjected. But Octavius was now by her side, and his presence supported her.

"Lead me to him!" she faintly murmured. "Lead me to him, and let me give him one last parting kiss, and receive his last parting benediction. I can bear it, Octavius; indeed I can;" she continued beseechingly, as she saw that he hesitated, while he looked at her pale features, and wild, haggard eye. But she pressed forward, and he saw that she was not to be turned from her purpose. He took her arm in his, and, closely followed by Felicitas, he led her through the crowd, who made way at his bidding, and approached the car in which her father lay. The driver paused at his command, and Numidicus opened his closed eyes, and uttered a cry of joyful surprise at the sight of his child.

Marcella could not speak. Tears flowed down her pallid cheeks; and, falling on the helpless form, so lately full of life and vigour, she embraced her beloved father, and kissed his cold brow. Numidicus was the first to speak.

"'Sorrow not for me, as those without hope,' my child," he said. "Ours is but a brief separation; and ere long we shall be united again, to part no more for ever. I go before you to the presence of your Father and my Father, your God and my God. I go to your blessed mother, my sainted Sabina; and all the glorious company of those who have departed in the faith. But, oh! still more: I go to dwell with my Saviour!—with Him who died to purchase for me a place in the many mansions of His Father's house. My child, my darling Marcella, 'be thou faithful unto death, and He will give thee a crown of life!' Promise me this, my love, and I die in perfect peace!"

Marcella rose. She was calmed and elevated by the solemn tone of her father's voice; and she dared not disturb his heavenly feelings with any further expression of her own selfish grief.

She trembled violently, and her heart beat audibly; but she replied with firmness;

"By the grace of God I will follow you to heaven, my father; even if it should be by the same path of affliction and agony that you are called to tread."

"Then farewell on earth, my Marcella; and may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be your support, and His Spirit your guide. Kiss me once more, my child, and return to your dwelling to pray for me. It is the last kind office you can now pay me."

Marcella strove to speak; but the words died away unuttered. She imprinted one fervent kiss on her father's brow, and turned away in agony. Octavius motioned to the driver to proceed; and then, assisted by Felicitas, he supported the broken-hearted daughter to her sad dwelling: but she would not suffer him to remain with her.

"Go," she said, "and follow my father to the place of execution. Let him see one friendly face among the host of savage enemies who will surround him. Fear not for me; I will pass the fearful hour in prayer that my father's death

may be speedy, and his spirit cheered by the presence of his Redeemer."

Octavius obeyed her; and hastily followed the procession, which he overtook just as it entered the enclosure in which the stakes were fixed, and the fagots piled in heaps.

Silently, as sheep led to the slaughter, the martyrs were led to the stakes, and bound to them, each with a chain of iron round the waist. Instantly the fagots were placed around each victim; and, a lighted torch being applied, the flames leaped up high above their heads, enveloping their whole persons; and, in most instances, putting a speedy termination to their severe sufferings. Numidicus was the last who was lifted from the car; and, unable to support himself, was bound upright to his appointed stake. Many of his fellow-martyrs were already dead; and many were yet breathing forth prayers and praises with their expiring accents, when fire was set to the pile that was intended to consume the Presbyter, and release as pure a spirit as ever was "washed and made white *in the blood of the Lamb.*" Numidicus lifted his eyes to heaven; and while he felt the flames scorching his failing limbs, he raised his voice in one

of those hymns of triumphant praise that were the joy of the Christian Church. He was responded to by several of his dying companions; and the heathen spectators witnessed one of those many glorious scenes so common in the days of persecution. They saw how the faith that animated the souls of the martyrs, could raise them above fear and agony, and gild a violent death with a halo of peace and joy!

The savage idolators saw this, and they fiercely resented the Christians' song of triumph, as an insult to their gods. Weary of watching the flames, and of throwing fresh fagots on the fires, they gathered large stones, and cast them at the still living victims, in order to hasten their deaths, and put a stop to their strange melody. The chain that supported Numidicus gave way, and he fell senseless among the burning fagots, where his body was soon nearly covered with large stones. Shouts of victory and exultation rose from the crowd, and they left the field, satiated with the welcome sight of Christian sufferings and death.

Octavius returned to Marcella; and he told her how her noble father had expired with the

song of praise upon his tongue. His daughter could now thank God for his release. All his trials and all his sufferings were over; and she could believe that he was with Christ. Still one care occupied her breast. Her father's body would be left a prey to the birds and the beasts, unless some friendly hand should remove it from the scene of horror and desolation. She entreated Octavius to accompany her and her devoted friend Felicitas, that evening to the field, when the shades of night would afford them concealment; and to seek for her father's remains, and remove them to a place of safety. To this natural desire Octavius readily consented, although he could not conceal his apprehensions of danger on Marcella's account. It was agreed that he should come again to her dwelling soon after sunset; and Felicitas undertook that her husband, Revocatus, should meet him, and give his assistance in the enterprise: and in the mean time the young soldier returned to his home, anxious to ascertain his father's state after the trying scenes of the morning; and to convey to Vivia and Julius the information that their friend was supported by a lively and steadfast faith under her heavy afflictions.

He found Horatius deeply dejected; and unable to shake off the sad impression that he had been instrumental in the death of his friend. He, as well as Portia, and his son and daughter, listened with lively interest to the relation which Octavius gave them of the conduct of both Numidicus and Marcella: and they all united in endeavouring to devise the best and most expeditious plan for removing the latter to Utica, now that all her anxieties respecting her father were ended in his death. Horatius felt as if the only reparation he could make for the injury he had inflicted on the Presbyter, would be to show kindness to his bereaved daughter: and he proposed to send her to Utica the following day in one of his own carriages, under the care of Lucretia, and accompanied by one of her own female attendants. There, he said, she could be lodged, for a time, with a respectable family well known to him; and when the feeling which was at present excited against her in the minds of the populace had subsided, some arrangement for her future residence could be made. Octavius gratefully accepted this considerate offer; and thanked his father in his own name, and that of his be-

trothed, for so far overcoming his prejudices. He promised to arrange every thing with the orphan maid: and having communicated to his family the object of his present appointment with her, he hastened to Marcella's abode as the sun was disappearing behind the western promontory that bounded the bay of Carthage.

He found the maiden and her companions ready, and they all proceeded to the place of execution. Silence now reigned where so lately all was noise and tumult; and darkness shrouded the spot so recently lit up with many blazing death-piles. The only sound that met their ears was the appalling growl of several dogs, which had already discovered the work of slaughter that had been performed, and were contending for their horrid prey. Marcella shuddered; but, leaning on the arm of Octavius, she steadily advanced with him across the field towards the spot where he had seen her father sink down among the devouring flames. The lamps which Felicitas and Revocatus carried threw a flickering light on the surrounding objects, and Marcella turned sickening away as her eyes fell on the blackened and distorted forms of several of the martyrs that were still

suspended to the stakes over the yet smouldering fagots; while others had fallen into the burning mass, and their ashes were almost confounded with those of their funeral pile.

Sadly and silently Marcella and her companions reached the dreaded spot; and Octavius and the Christian slave immediately removed the stones that covered the body of Numidicus. The fire had committed comparatively little injury on that revered form, for he was the last of that little "army of martyrs" who was tied to the stake; and before the flames had time to do more than scorch his limbs, the merciful stones had put an end to his sufferings, and extinguished the fire.

Gently Octavius and Revocatus raised the body, and laid it on a large cloth which Felicitas spread on the ground to receive it; while Marcella stood trembling by, the bright lamp burning in her hand, yet fearing to look on the features she loved so well, lest she should see them mangled and frightfully consumed. An exclamation of surprise from Felicitas caused her to glance down; and, to her inexpressible relief, she saw that her father's face was uninjured, and lay before her calm and serene in

death. She knelt down, and gazed with love and admiration on that fine countenance, from which not even the bitterest agonies had had power to banish the expression of heavenly peace that dwelt so habitually there; and then she assisted her friendly attendant in composing the contracted limbs, and covering the body with grave-clothes. A light litter had been brought by Revocatus; and while he and Octavius were arranging it for the transportation of the corpse to the subterranean church among the ruins, they were startled by a wild shriek from Marcella.

"He lives!—he breathes!" she cried, and bending over the body, she held her own breath to watch for a return of the signs of life she had perceived. Octavius laid his hand on the heart which he believed had ceased to beat for ever; and great was his surprise to feel a weak fluttering there. He hardly dared to hope; but he raised the head of the Presbyter, and while Marcella supported it on her knees, the slaves brought water from a neighbouring brook, and chafed his temples, and bathed his hands and his face. Soon his breast began to heave;—and oh! what joy for Marcella!—at

length his eyes opened, and he gazed at her; but not yet with a look of intelligence.

"Where are my accusers?" he murmured indistinctly. "Where are my executioners? They said that I should wear the crown of martyrdom, and pass in flames to the presence of my Saviour, and join my Sabina there. Ha!" he exclaimed, with more animation, and fixing his kindling eyes on Marcella,—"I see her now. She has come to welcome me to the courts of heaven. Yes! this is blessedness!"

His eyes closed, and he fainted; and it was long before the anxious and unremitted cares of his daughter, and her companions, could again recal him to life. When at length they succeeded his recollection also returned, and he was able to comprehend all that had befallen him. If, as surely he must, the Presbyter felt deep regret at thus being called back to earth and all its cares, and sins, and sorrows, yet the sight of his daughter's overpowering joy at his restoration was sufficient to make him repress all expression of such feelings; and in a feeble voice he joined her and his rejoicing Christian friends, in pouring

forth their grateful praises for his miraculous preservation.*

Numidicus was far too much enfeebled by all that he had undergone to be able to support himself, and had it been otherwise, it would have been highly inexpedient to run any risk of his being seen and recognised. He was, therefore, placed on the litter, and the cloth thrown over him, so as entirely to conceal his person, and give the appearance of a dead body being borne to its interment. This precaution being taken, he was carried by Octavius and Revocatas to the temporary church among the ruins, while his now happy daughter and Felicitas hastened home to procure for him clothes and needful refreshments. It was near midnight when they joined the Presbyter in the church, and they found him greatly recovered, though still very weak, and suffering much from the cruel treatment to which he had been subjected. A bed was prepared for him upon the floor, and suitable nourishment was given to him, and then

* Numidicus of Carthage was actually thus restored to life by the pious care of his daughter, who visited his place of execution to seek his honoured remains, and procure for them Christian burial.—See Jamieson's "Primitive Christianity."

Marcella prepared to watch through the night by his couch. Felicitas and her husband were unwillingly compelled to return to their master's house, for fear of discovery, but Octavius proposed to remain and assist Marcella in the care of her father. To this, however, neither Numidicus nor his daughter would consent, for they knew how the fears of his parents would be excited if he did not return until the morning, particularly as they were aware of the rather perilous nature of the enterprise in which he was that night engaged. To this consideration he was reluctantly obliged to yield, and he departed with the slaves, promising to return at early dawn, and bring a carriage capable of conveying Marcella and her father, and one attendant, to Utica. The proposal of Horatius, that Vivia's nurse should accompany Marcella, and establish her in her appointed asylum, was now to be declined, as it would be dangerous to allow the bigoted Lucretia to become acquainted with the fact of Numidicus's existence, and the protection of her presence was no longer needed by his daughter.

It was an anxious and a painful night that Marcella passed beside the couch of her suf-

fering parent, for Numidicus was fearfully exhausted, and more than once she dreaded lest the blessing, so wonderfully restored to her, should be snatched away again; and thankful indeed was she when she saw the form of Octavius enter the gloomy retreat, ere yet the first morning rays had appeared. He brought a powerful cordial, prepared by his mother and Vivia, which he immediately administered to the sufferer, and he and Marcella had the pleasure of seeing that it greatly revived him. One faithful female servant of the Presbyter's accompanied Octavius. She was a pagan, but she owed her liberty to Numidicus, and she was sincerely attached both to him and his daughter; she could, therefore, be safely trusted with the secret of his recovery, and she lent her useful aid in supporting him to the carriage, which waited for him near the entrance to the church.

Octavius himself undertook the office of driver, which, on this occasion, it would not have been safe to place in other hands; and the journey to the neighbouring town of Utica was performed with as much rapidity as the strength of the Presbyter would permit. The

family to whom Horatius had given his son a letter of introduction, were entirely ignorant of the names of their new inmates, and of the cause of their wish to reside under their roof. They merely supposed that Numidicus was an invalid, who sought the bracing air of Utica to promote his restoration to health and strength; and they showed the greatest anxiety to do all in their power to ensure his comfort and retirement, and that of his daughter, so long as they should remain inmates of their dwelling.

It was a source of great satisfaction to Octavius, to leave his affianced bride and her father in so secure and comfortable an asylum; and he returned to convey to his family the welcome news of the complete success of his enterprise, and to discuss with Vivia his future plans for the safety of those who were so dear to him, and the possibility of ere long effecting his marriage with Marcella.

Vivia entered with warm interest into all her brother's anxieties; but she was dejected and care-worn, for weeks had passed away, and yet her much-loved husband seemed unconscious that his lovely and affectionate wife

still existed. Openly he took no sort of notice of her, nor ever replied to the messages she repeatedly sent to him, requesting a personal interview; yet he was not really unmindful of her, and his heart bled at the severity he felt himself called upon to employ. He cherished a strong hope that by these harsh measures he should bring her to repent of her folly; for he well knew her devoted attachment to himself, and he had no conception of any spiritual feeling that could overpower the influence of such strong affection, and render it subservient to higher and yet purer motives. He was firmly resolved that nothing should ever induce him to receive his wife under his roof, while she remained true to her present principles, but he had no idea that her perseverance would be so obstinate and so enduring; and something like anger arose in his breast, as, day after day, and week after week, elapsed, and yet he found that no change was taking place in her sentiments. It is true that her body declined, and became gradually weaker, but her spirit was sustained by a living faith, and was stronger than ever. The chief consolation that she enjoyed from any earthly object, was found

in training the mind of her little girl, and watching her rapid growth in grace, and in spiritual knowledge. The child astonished even Vivia by the strong feelings, and clear views she entertained on the subject of religion. The very spirit of martyrdom seemed to reside in the infant believer; and she often entreated her anxious mother not to have any fears for her, as she would rather die than deny her love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

To Portia, the little Elva often spoke of her Saviour, in terms so touching, and so sweetly childlike and natural, that her grandmother could not chide her; and at length she even felt an interest in listening to her, and an increasing curiosity as to the truth of those doctrines which had made so deep an impression, not only on the soul of her daughter, but also on that of the simple child. After a time, this interest and curiosity ripened almost into conviction; and had not Portia been restrained by pride, and fear, and prejudice, she would have declared herself a believer in Jesus.*

* All Vivia Perpetua's family, with the exception of her father, were converted about this time to Christianity.—See Fleury's "Ecclesiastical History."

But these feelings kept her back; and she carefully concealed from her husband and children, all knowledge of the change that had taken place in her sentiments. She would have concealed it from herself, but conscience was too powerful to be stifled; and she secretly owned that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, and the Saviour of men, long before she could bring herself to bow her stubborn knee, or lift up her perverse heart in His worship. Oh! had Vivia and her brothers known the blessed truth that their mother had indeed been brought, in any measure, to a knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus," how fervently would their grateful praises have ascended to Heaven, and how joyfully would they have welcomed any tribulations, and any events, that had conduced to so blessed a result! But this happiness was denied them at present; and bitterer trials than any they had yet experienced, were in store for them.

CHAPTER XII.

My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.—2 *Corinthians* xii. 9.

SEVERAL weeks of comparative tranquillity passed away, after the events which have been related; and Vivia remained true to her faith, and altogether unmoved by the arguments and exhortations of her heathen teacher, or by the far more powerful motive which was presented to her,—the hope of a reconciliation with her husband. The patience of Marcus was exhausted; and his irritated feelings were greatly excited by his father, who lost no opportunity of exasperating him against his wife and her family; and urging him to remove Vivia from the evil influence and example of her brother Julius, and also from what he considered the too-indulgent forbearance of her parents. Fabius was indignant at the conduct of Horatius, and of both his sons, during the trial of Numidicus and Marcella; and he desired nothing more

ardently than to revenge upon his old friend, the insult which he had received from the Presbyter. How could he do this more effectually than by drawing down fresh calamities upon the head of his amiable daughter, Vivia, the wife of his own son?

For this vile and malignant purpose, he used every means in his power to poison the mind of Marcus, not only against his wife's relatives, but also against herself and her little child; and to induce him to insist on the adoption of harsher measures than had yet been employed, to compel Vivia to abandon her present faith. The magistrate found his son, at first, very averse to trying any severer method than that of separating himself from his wife, so long as she obstinately clung to her errors. But by degrees, Fabius worked upon his worse feelings of intolerance, and wounded pride, and disappointed affection. He represented to him that so long as Vivia remained under her parents' roof, no hope of her submission to his wishes, and return to her duty, could be anticipated: but that if she was made to feel that the consequence of her future obstinacy would be not only the continuance of her husband's

displeasure, but also an entire separation from all her family, and a deprivation of every comfort to which she had been accustomed in her luxurious home, she would doubtless perceive the folly of her present conduct, and the wisdom of regaining her proper position in life, at the expense of abandoning her new opinions. In order to reconcile Marcus to the measures which he desired to employ, the wily magistrate promised to secure the concurrence of the Proconsul in his schemes; and to obtain from him a promise, that if Vivia was accused before his tribunal of the crime of Christianity, and proved steadfast in her profession of faith, her punishment should be limited to banishment from Carthage and its neighbourhood, during her husband's pleasure. More severe and terrific chastisements might indeed be threatened, in the hope of working on her fears; and, knowing her natural timidity, and her shrinking from danger and from pain, Marcus little doubted the efficacy which such threats would have in subduing the spirit of Vivia. He had indeed seen, and wondered at, the heroic resolution and self-command which she displayed on the memorable evening of his

father's festival: but he did not believe her capable of maintaining such resolution, when not under the influence of similar excitement; and more especially now that her bodily powers were weakened by long confinement and anxiety.

He therefore consented that his beautiful and virtuous wife should be publicly brought as a criminal before the judgment-seat of Saturninus: and moreover he agreed himself to be her accuser, believing that such a procedure would have a powerful effect in overpowering her feelings. Every necessary preliminary step was taken, but without the knowledge of any part of Vivia's family; for Fabius feared that they would take instant measures to remove her to a place of safety, if they apprehended that any such trials awaited her. And he was right; for the daughter and sister was dearly loved, and highly prized, both by her parents and her brothers; and much as Horatius, and Portia also, regretted her apostasy, and desired her return to the religion which they openly professed, yet they would never have sought to move her by public severity, or by subjecting her to personal hardships. And her brothers

regarded her with higher feelings. They loved her for all her amiable and endearing qualities; and they respected her for her bold avowal of her faith, and her noble sacrifice of every private feeling, and every hope of earthly happiness, rather than be false to her principles.

The new trial that was designed to put the faith and patience of Vivia to the proof, was only made known to her family by the arrival, one morning, of an officer of the Proconsul, attended by several lictors; who, in the name of the Emperor, demanded, and instantly obtained, admission to the saloon, where the whole party were assembled together. Fear and astonishment were depicted on every countenance as the unexpected and unwelcome visitor approached the couch on which Vivia and her little Elva were seated; and, having demanded their names, read his legal warrant, and formally apprehended them both as offenders against the laws of the empire.

Vivia alone was calm. She besought her parents and brothers to make no resistance, and professed her readiness instantly to accompany the officers. But she turned deadly pale when she looked at Elva, and saw that she was in the

rude grasp of the soldiers, and that terror was marked on her infant features.

"Must my child go with me?" she demanded of the officer, in whose countenance she read more of gentleness than was visible in those of his rough companions. "She, at least," she added, "cannot have offended against the laws of the Emperor, for she is incapable of knowing them. I alone can be answerable for all her actions. Leave her with my parents, I entreat you."

"My orders are to take the child with you, lady," replied the officer respectfully. "I must obey: but I hope it will be my more pleasing office soon to conduct both her and you in freedom and happiness to your home again."

Vivia sighed deeply. Happiness—*earthly* happiness—she saw no prospect of: and a home in heaven was now the object of her fondest hope. She could not doubt for what crime she was now about to be arraigned before the judge; and she knew the fearful nature of the punishments usually awarded to such criminals too well to hope for her own speedy release; for the thought of purchasing freedom by recantation never crossed her breast. She approached

her mother, who stood weeping and motionless, while feelings of a contending nature agitated her features. Portia did not speak: but she embraced her daughter as if she feared it might be for the last time: while Horatius broke forth into bitter lamentations at the miseries which his children's sin and folly had brought upon themselves and their family; and earnestly besought Vivia to remember her duty to her husband and her parents, and not to endanger their peace any further by resisting the righteous commands of the representative of the Emperor.

Vivia made no reply. She only kissed the hands and brow of her distressed father; and, leaning on the arm of Octavius, she followed the officer to the entrance: while Elva accompanied her, led by Julius. Both the brothers of the prisoner designed to attend her to the place of trial: but the situation in which Julius had already stood there himself so recently, rendered Vivia apprehensive of the consequences of his appearing there again; especially as the companion and brother of one accused of the same crime. She therefore entreated, and even commanded him to remain and cheer his

parents; while Octavius, whose fidelity to Paganism was as yet unsuspected, would protect her, and support her through the trying scene.

Julius reluctantly complied, and took a sad farewell of his sister and niece; and he whispered to them words of heavenly consolation and spiritual strength, while tears flowed from his eyes. Vivia firmly took her seat in the car, which waited to convey her and Elva; and, accompanied by Octavius, and followed by the guards, they quickly reached the town-hall, where Saturninus and his attendants awaited their arrival. The anxious curiosity of Vivia was excited to conjecture who was her accuser. She never dreamed of Marcus; but she felt it was possible that Fabius might have instigated some vile spirit to seek her ruin; for she knew his malignant, revengeful disposition, and she was aware how much his feelings had been excited against both her father and herself since the return of Marcus;—that event to which she had so long looked forward as the restoration of her perfect happiness; but which, alas! had proved its utter destruction.

The questions which Elva addressed to her, and to her uncle Octavius, withdrew her mind

from these thoughts, to fix them sadly on the possible sufferings that might await that sweet, engaging child. But she did not allow such thoughts to shake her firmness, or inspire a wish that Elva should betray the cause to which, young as she was, she had voluntarily pledged herself. On the contrary, she employed the time that was occupied by their drive to the town-hall, in preparing and fortifying the mind of the little girl for the scene she was so soon to take part in; and her soul rejoiced in the simple faith and courage that the child manifested in her reply.

"I will not make you ashamed, dear mother," she said. "I will show you that I am not afraid to own my love for Jesus; and you know He has promised to take care of all who love Him. He will take care of you, mother, and of me too; and if they kill us we shall go together to dwell with Him for ever in heaven."

"So be it, my darling child!" said Vivia, solemnly, and she kissed the innocent, expressive face that looked up so lovingly and confidingly in hers; and she thanked her God for making her the mother of such a child.

In a few moments Vivia Perpetua, the beautiful and respected Roman matron, and her young and lovely child, stood as accused culprits before the judgment-seat of Saturninus. The usual summons was made, and Marcus stood forth as their accuser.

"My father!" cried Elva; and holding out her arms, she would have run to embrace him, but the guard restrained her.

Vivia did not speak. She hardly breathed when she beheld her husband take his place by the Proconsul, and heard him,—in a low and hurried tone indeed,—declare himself the prosecutor of his wife and child. She never raised her eyes again while he was speaking; but she held little Elva's hand in her own trembling grasp, and she listened while Marcus replied to the interrogations of the judge, and gave him undeniable proofs of her being guilty of the crime laid to her charge. When his evidence, and that of Fabius, who fully confirmed it all, were finished, the judge, as usual, called on the prisoner for her defence. Then she raised her eyes, and fixed them for one moment on the pale, agitated countenance of her husband, who strove to avoid her glance, and to conceal his

deep emotion, by assuming an expression of stern displeasure. Vivia drew a deep sigh, and then, in a low, but articulate voice, she replied—

"I plead guilty to every charge laid against me."

"You confess yourself a Christian then, and as such, amenable to the laws which have been established for the abolition of that degrading heresy?" demanded the judge.

"I do," she replied gently. "If the law regards Christianity as a crime, I cannot dispute the power or the right of the Government to punish it. I submit to its decrees."

"But have you considered the severity of the punishment to which you render yourself liable by this daring confession?" continued Saturninus. "Are you aware, lady, that you have acknowledged yourself guilty of a capital crime, and that the law you have broken demands your life for its expiation; and that in a manner which I shrink from naming to one so young, so noble, so cherished, as the daughter of the patrician, Horatius?"

"I know that the stake is the common termination of the trials and sufferings of the

disciples of Jesus," answered Vivia. And with brightening eyes, and flushing cheeks, she continued—"But I know also that after that fearful death, a home of rest and peace awaits the steadfast martyr. I know that there all tears shall be wiped from my eyes, and that I shall see my Saviour, and be blessed."

"Madness! folly!" cried Saturninus. "Have you too learned to put your trust in these visionary joys, for which so many infatuated disciples of the Nazarean malefactor have already sacrificed the substantial joys of earth? Have you too resolved to throw away a life that is valuable to so many friends and relatives, for the sake of an impostor, who called himself a God, and yet could not even escape a death of shame and agony?"

"I have learned," answered Vivia, raising her eyes meekly to heaven, "'to look not at the things which are seen, and are temporal, but at those things which are not seen, and are eternal.' And I have resolved to bear all sufferings patiently, for the sake of Him who *was God as well as man*, and who *voluntarily* endured a life of sorrow, and a death of shame and agony, to save me from endless misery in

hell, and to purchase for me everlasting happiness in heaven!"

Marcus wrung his hands, and turned away to hide his disappointed, angry feelings, at the calm resolution displayed by his wife: while the Proconsul spoke in a low voice to Fabius, and consulted with him as to the best means of subduing the unexpected firmness of his daughter-in-law.

"Try her through her child," whispered Fabius. By this time the impatience of the populace, both in the court and in the street, began to be manifested by the usual dreadful cry,—"To the fire with the Christians!" and Saturninus marked the cheek of little Elva turn to an ashy paleness, as the shout fell on her ears; and she clung to her mother in terror, while Vivia regarded her with a look of agonized tenderness. He commanded and enforced silence, and then again addressed the prisoners.

"You seem, lady, to have no regard for your own life, or for the happiness of your family; but have you none for the life of that lovely child? Is she also to be made a victim to your folly? Is she also to suffer for the

sake of a name? And can you, her mother, stand by unmoved to witness it?"

"May the Lord preserve my child!" cried Vivia, in a tone of anguish. "But if it is His will that she must die, oh! rather would I see her perish than hear her deny the Lord who bought her with his blood."

"Elva," said the judge, sternly, "are you a Christian?"

"I am," replied the child, in a faltering voice.

"And will you die rather than return to your father's religion?"

"My father worships idols," said the child, "and I cannot do so again. I hope he will soon worship the Lord Jesus."

"She has been well tutored, by heaven!" exclaimed the judge to Fabius. "We must break this little spirit. My poor child," he continued to Elva, "I am unwilling to condemn you to the flames with your mother. If I promise to pardon both her and you, will you kneel at that altar, and pray to the gods who reign over the earth and sky?"

"I will pray to the one God, Jehovah, who created every thing in heaven and earth; and

to His Son, Jesus Christ; but I cannot pray to false gods, who have no power to hear me."

"Cease this folly!" cried Saturninus in anger. "I am weary of listening to such impiety;" then turning to one of the guards, he said aloud, "bring hither the foot-screw."

Vivia would have sunk to the earth, but that Octavius, who stood near her, supported her; and a seat being brought she was placed in it, and wine poured into her mouth to revive her. She opened her eyes as the engine of torture was laid on the table before the judge.

"Place the child's foot in it, and crush it to atoms, unless she or her mother retract their words," said the Proconsul.

A shriek of terror broke from the lips of Elva; and falling on her knees, she drew her mother's flowing robe around her, and cried in a voice that pierced the wretched Vivia's heart, —"Save me, mother, save me!"

"Shall I *sin* to save you, my precious child?" murmured Vivia.

"Oh, no!" sobbed the terrified child. "But let us die, mother. Let them kill us both at once, but do not let them torture me."

The heart of Marcus could endure no more.

He saw that no human terrors could move his wife, and that all present hope of her return to his home and his affection was over. He hastily approached the judge, and said,—

"It is enough! Their lives must be spared, and their persons must be sacred from all injury; but I cast them off for ever! Proceed, my lord, to the sentence of banishment, which is the mildest punishment which the law allows in so aggravated a case. I will take care that it is executed speedily and effectually."

Marcus then retired to a seat behind the Proconsul; and, burying his face in his hands, he listened to the decree of banishment from the city and its vicinity, which was pronounced on the wife and child, who were dearer to him than words could tell, although pride, ignorance, and fanaticism, led him thus to break the sacred ties that bound them so closely together.

The joy and gratitude that filled the heart of Vivia, when she saw that her soul was not to be pierced by witnessing the mangling of her little Elva's tender limbs, was so great, that she hardly either heard or comprehended the sentence that was uttered against her.

Kneeling on the pavement, she held her child in her arms; and tears, which no fear of death or suffering in her own person could wring from her, now flowed copiously, and mingled with those of Elva. She was aroused by her brother to a sense of her real situation; for Octavius saw the guards approach to lead her to the prison, where she was to remain until the necessary measures for her removal from Carthage could be taken; and he came to take a sad, perhaps a last, farewell of her and her child.

Vivia rose; and, embracing him, she whispered words of comfort and affection for her parents and Julius. Then, by a strong effort, she regained her composure, and leading Elva by the hand, followed her guide to the secure apartment appointed for her place of custody.

Deep was the grief that was felt in the dwelling of Horatius when his son returned to tell his sister's fate. And yet the sentence was less severe than her parents and brothers had feared; for, not knowing who was to be her accuser, they had dreaded that a violent death might be the result of her prosecution. They ardently desired to see her once more, but this was

strictly prohibited; and the only indulgence that was allowed them was a permission to send Lucretia to attend her in prison; and, if she was willing, in her banishment also. To this the faithful nurse readily consented, for her heart was bound up in the fate of her mistress; and all her detestation of Christianity could not make her less devoted to Vivia and her child than she had ever been.

The place of Vivia's intended banishment was kept secret from her family, for Fabius dreaded their taking some measures to remove her to a less dreary situation; and he persuaded Marcus that the hardships and privations she would have to encounter, would probably be the means of subduing her proud and obdurate spirit; while, if she was permitted to hold any intercourse with her family, and especially with the wild, enthusiastic Julius, she would probably only persist in her errors, of which, indeed, he considered that their negligence, and improper indulgence, had been the primary cause.

CHAPTER XIII.

Afflicted saint! to Christ draw near,
Thy Saviour's gracious promise hear;
His faithful word declares to thee,
That "as thy day thy strength shall be."

When thou art called to bear the Cross,
Or sore affliction, pain, or loss,
Or deep distress, or poverty,
Still "as thy day thy strength shall be."

Thy faith is weak, thy foes are strong,
And if the conflict should be long,
Thy Lord will make the tempter flee,
For "as thy day thy strength shall be."—ANON.

THE peninsula on which both the cities of Carthage and Utica were built, formed a part of the ancient district of *Zeugitana*, now comprehended in that of Tunis. Through this district flowed the river *Bagradas*, now known by the name of *Majerdah*; and its waters were swelled by many tributary streams and brooks, that then brought a partial fertility to the plains and valleys, and were fringed with grass and shrubs, among which the slender acacia

and the gay, pink-flowering oleander, were conspicuous. The aboriginal inhabitants of Zeugitana were called *Amazirgh*, or *Tamzirght;* and are supposed to have been the same race of people that now occupy the wilder parts of the kingdom of Tunis, and are denominated *Berbers.*

In the days when Carthage, and the neighbouring cities, were in the hands of the Roman conquerors of the land, the half-savage natives dwelt in rude huts among the mountains; or pitched their tents for a time in the more fertile plains, retiring again to their secure mountain retreats, as either danger or inclination prompted them to change their residence. As their name denotes,* they were a free and independent people, yielding little obedience to the Romans; and readily escaping from their pursuit by flying to their almost inaccessible fastnesses, high up in the western range of hills, that bounded the province. Some more peaceable tribes of this wild race had settled in permanent villages in the neighbourhood of the Roman colonies, and had derived a partial civilization from their intercourse with the

* *Amazirgh* signifies "free" or "noble."

powerful rulers of the known world. Some of the simplest arts were practised by these villagers, and around their huts some traces of cultivation were to be seen; though the chief sources of their subsistence continued to be their flocks and herds, that roamed unrestrained over the surrounding plains, and the fish which they caught abundantly in the streams, and in the neighbouring gulf.

Frequent depredations were committed on their herds by the wild beasts that lurked in the caves and dens of the mountains; and occasionally they would even, when pressed by hunger, enter the villages, and attack the inhabitants. The shrill cry of the hyena, and the growl of the panther, were often heard in the stillness of night; and the chase of these creatures, with that of the less terrific zebra and ostrich, formed the occupation and amusement of almost the whole male population. The huge hippopotamus occasionally showed itself near the margin of the river, and birds of brilliant hues sported in every tree and shrub; while gorgeous creepers climbed the trunks of the lofty palms, and hung in rich garlands from the branches of the tamarisk trees.

It was a scene of mingled beauty and desolation that met the eyes of Vivia and her little girl, as, on the evening of the day that followed that of their trial and condemnation, they entered one of the valleys formed by the range of mountains that lay about twenty miles to the west of Carthage. This valley was watered by one of the tributary streams that flowed into the *Bagradas*, and its comparative fertility caused it to be the resort of a settled population of the native *Amazirgh*, then on terms of alliance with the Romans. Several villages of a considerable size were scattered through this extensive valley, the chief of which was built near the borders of the deep inlet, then called the Gulf of *Sisera*, and esteemed by the ancients as one of the safest harbours in North Africa. The narrow channel that opened a communication from the harbour to the sea, was guarded by the strongly fortified town of *Hippo-Zarytus*, then a place of importance, and the emporium of much commercial wealth, but since fallen into decay and poverty.*

* The channel is now nearly choked up with sand and rubbish, and the bay has assumed the appearance of a great lake, where only fishing boats are to be seen.

To the principal village of the *Amazirgh* Vivia and her companions were conducted. She was escorted by some of the Proconsul's guard, and accompanied by Lucretia and her son Rufus. The latter was not to remain with her in exile; his commission being only to secure for his unhappy mistress a commodious hut, and furnish it with such necessaries as were deemed indispensible; more was not accorded to her by her husband and father-in-law, as they expected by bodily privations to subject the spirit of the exile to their will. How little they knew of the power of a holy and self-denying faith, in subduing the desires of the flesh to those of the spirit!

This village was the appointed place of Vivia's banishment; and here she was condemned to remain, until she either yielded to the wishes of her husband, or till death should release her from his tyranny. She was placed by the officer commanding the escort, under the protection of the native chief of the village, who became answerable for her safety, and also for her remaining within the boundaries of his little territory: and, all needful arrangements having been made for the subsistence of the exiled

party, the Roman guard and Rufus left the place, and commenced their return towards Carthage; taking with them the carriage in which Vivia and her companions had performed the journey.

Notwithstanding the absence of every luxury, and even comfort, to which the high-born Roman lady had been accustomed, it was not with any feeling of repining or discontent that Vivia looked around the rude dwelling which was henceforth to be her home. She had suffered too severely in the utter destruction of her dearly-prized domestic happiness, to have any sorrow left for privations such as these. *With* her husband's love, this hut would have been a palace. *Without* it, no palace could be to her more than a shelter from the winds and storms of heaven: all places were alike desolate now. And yet there was one comfort left to her. Her child was with her; and, unchecked, and unmolested, she could breathe into her listening ear, and impress on her willing heart, the truths which had cost her such a fearful sacrifice, and which were now dearer to her soul than ever: for she had proved their mighty influence in arming her timid nature with a

courage not her own, and enduing her trembling heart with strength to pass triumphantly through struggles that once she felt would have crushed her to the earth. With grateful feelings she recalled the day when her beloved friend, Marcella, had sought to inspire her with confidence in "the arm of the Lord;" and to make her trust in His sure promise, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." Now she *knew* that that promise was true: and she resolved, in humble dependence on the strength which had hitherto supported her, to bear up to the utmost under her accumulated trials; and, for her dear child's sake, to meet them even with cheerfulness.

The liberty to roam at pleasure through the neighbouring woods and ravines, or on the pebbly shores of the gulf, was not denied to her; for there was little possibility of her effecting her escape, on foot, from her place of banishment, even if she could have hoped to improve her condition by doing so. But no other home was open to her: no other retreat could restore to her what she had lost: and Vivia had no desire to exchange the society of the friendly savages by whom she was surrounded, for that

of men who called themselves civilized, but whose hearts were far harder than those of the *Amazirgh*. The simple villagers were attracted by her striking grace and beauty, and that of her little girl; and the gentleness of her manners soon won their regard and affection. In a few days the little Elva was the favourite of the whole village; and, as her childish spirits returned, she joined in the sports of the young and active natives, and played around her mother's hut with them, although ignorant of their language; while Vivia watched her every movement, and smiled sadly at the innocent child's forgetfulness of her own and her mother's melancholy situation.

Lucretia had followed her mistress into banishment; and she had done so voluntarily; for her love for Vivia and Elva was deep and sincere, and she could not have remained contentedly in an abode of comfort, and known that they were suffering severe privation. The justice of the sentence, which had cut them off from every social and domestic enjoyment, she did not dispute; for to her prejudiced mind, few crimes could appear so heinous as that of forsaking the worship of the gods she had been

tions, as if they were actually performed by the objects of her fond anxiety, and would pardon their impiety, and cleanse them from it. How sad, that such faithful and persevering prayers should be addressed to one, who could neither hear nor answer them!

From the time that Vivia had openly declared herself a Christian, she had lost no opportunity of endeavouring to implant the blessed principles of Christ's religion in the heart of her devoted slave. But all her efforts had been met by the most determined opposition, and, at length, by a firm, but respectful refusal, ever to listen to such blasphemies; for even slaves did not consider themselves obliged to yield obedience to a Christian master or mistress, on any matter connected with their despised religion. But when Vivia found that her heathen attendant had voluntarily consented to follow her into exile, the hope of making her a rich return for her devoted attachment, by leading her "out of darkness into the mavellous light of the Gospel," returned: and, ere long, she renewed her attacks on the strong bulwarks of ignorance and superstition, that Satan had built up round the soul

of Lucretia. To her grief and disappointment, her efforts met with the same reception as before. Her words fell unheeded on the ear of the hardened idolater: and she found that the very truths which had so readily affected her own heart, and approved themselves to her own judgment, when revealed to her by Marcella; and which had even proved more rapid and effectual in winning the soul of her child from error, and leading her to a knowledge of the truth, were altogether powerless in shaking her slave's attachment to her idols. Her renewed attempts only served to irritate Lucretia's naturally warm temper, and to excite her to give vent to expressions regarding the Christian religion, and its divine Founder, that were painful to her ears, and highly improper for Elva to listen to, and therefore she forbore to address her any more on the subject. But she did not neglect to pray for her, and to teach her child to offer up her supplications also to the God of all grace and power, that He would be graciously pleased to soften her nurse's heart, and turn it from the love of idols to the knowledge of the true God, and the only Saviour: and that they might thus hope

to meet again in Heaven with one, who on earth, had dedicated her life and all her powers to them. Well it was that these faithful prayers were addressed to Him, whose eye is ever looking on His people; and whose ears are open to their prayers; and who is All-powerful, and All-merciful to do for them, *in His own good time*, "exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask!"

The days, and weeks, and months, passed slowly away; and no change came over the condition of the exiles. The hope which, in spite of her better judgment, Vivia had entertained that her husband would relent, and take her back to be his *Christian* wife, had faded away; and she began to realize the dreadful truth that he intended her to live and die in the solitude and desolation of her present abode. And solitude it was; for what companionship could the cultivated mind of the Roman matron find among the simple savages, who gazed at her with wonder and admiration, as a being of a superior order to themselves, and replied in wild guttural accents to her attempts at holding communication with them. Few, except the chief, understood

the Roman tongue in the slightest degree; and he was a harsh repulsive being, from whom Vivia shrank with instinctive horror. The malignant glance of his deep-set eye, for which the present descendants of the ancient *Amazirgh* are still so remarkable, was such as to terrify Elva, whenever the savage chieftain crossed their path; nor could her mother regard him altogether without fear, although his demeanour was always respectful, and he showed an inclination to obey the directions of the Proconsul, by watching over the personal safety of the exiles committed to his charge. In complexion the Amazirgh were not much darker than the Romans; and many of the women and children had fair skins, and light hair and eyes. But their dress and manners were those of a wild and uncultivated race;—rough woollen or fur jackets, without sleeves —loose trowsers of the same material,—and occasionally a wide *Baracan* or cloak, being the costume of both sexes; while the children were either entirely naked, or very scantily clothed.

Such beings could be no companions for Vivia; and soon the novelty of their man-

ners and mode of life ceased to attract her attention; and most of her time was passed in melancholy reflection, as she sat either on the shore of the gulf, or beneath the shade of a cluster of olive trees and date-palms, by the side of the sparkling brook that watered the valley; while Elva and her young companions amused themselves with gathering shells or gay flowers, and chasing the shining lizards and insects that enlivened the sand and broken rocks around. From this favourite retreat of the exiles, a view was obtained of considerable extent down the valley; even as far as the place, many miles distant, where the rapid mountain stream fell into the bed of the broad *Bagradas*. Near that spot the natives kept a rude ferry-boat, or rather a raft, for the purpose of effecting a passage for themselves and their cattle, when the waters of the river were too much swollen to admit of their being waded through. On that raft Vivia, with her equipage and companions had been carried over the *Bagradas* on the sad day when she bade a long, and perhaps a last, farewell to happiness, and kindred, and home. And often the lonely exile would sit for hours

together, with her tearful eyes fixed on the impassable boundary that separated her from so much that was dear to her heart; and think of all that she had lost, and the sad lot to which her own decision had condemned herself and her child.

And did she regret that decision:—did she wish that she could recal the words and the actions for which she now "endured the loss of all things?" Vivia was but a human being;—a warm-hearted woman;—and a passionately devoted wife;—and her heart was pierced with anguish, and well-nigh broken, at the uprooting of all her best affections: and the Evil One was ever busy with suggestions that she might have retained her faith and yet not so utterly have wrecked her earthly happiness: and sometimes these suggestions took such possession of her mind, as almost to drive her to frenzy. But Vivia was *not alone* in her sore temptations. He "who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin," was with her by His Spirit, in this her hour of need; and "His grace was sufficient for her." Never did Satan so far gain the mastery over her soul, as to make her regret

her bold avowal of being Christ's disciple, or repine at the sufferings she now endured for His name's sake. Yes;—"greater was He that was for her, than all they that were against her;" and, supported by His "everlasting arm," she stood upright; and her faith did not fail her under the lengthened and heart-sickening trial of "hope deferred," of affection blighted,—of neglect, privation, and solitude. She endured all, as "seeing Him who is invisible," and who has declared that "whosoever shall confess Him before men, him will He also confess before His Father, and before the angels."

And Vivia not only endured her trial with resignation; she was also enabled to feel and acknowledge that it came from the hand of a merciful Father, "who doth not willingly afflict, or grieve the children of men;" but "chasteneth those whom He loveth," not for His pleasure, but for their profit. She looked back on the time when she had stifled her inward convictions of the truth, and shut her eyes to the light of the gospel, and hardened her heart against its saving doctrines, because she knew that the reception of the divine truth, and the heavenly

light, and the confession of the doctrines of the gospel, would break up her earthly peace, and perhaps make shipwreck of all that constituted her happiness. "O my God!" she murmured, as these recollections forced themselves with energy upon her mind: "O my God! I confess that I then loved my husband more than my Saviour:—I resisted conviction for his dear sake:—I feared the loss of his love more than the loss of my immortal soul:—I dreaded his anger more than the wrath of my Creator and Redeemer:—and in justice and in mercy Thou, Lord, hast taken my idol from me, and shewn me that Christ must be my *all*. Thou hast removed me from temptations that might have proved too hard for me; and brought me into this wilderness to plead with my soul, and to purify it in the fire of affliction. Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight. Deal with me as Thou wilt; but oh! suffer me not to depart from Thee, or to dishonour the holy name whereby I am called!"

With such feelings as these the exile might be sad, but she could not be in despair. Happiness was indeed denied her; but *peace*,—that "peace which passeth all understanding," and

which was the Saviour's parting legacy to His sorrowing and afflicted disciples, was her portion: and if it was occasionally troubled by strong temptation, and disturbed by overwhelming natural feelings, yet it ever returned again when she sought the only source of peace; and her spirit regained its tranquillity, as the surface of a lake when the rude winds are hushed; and that tried spirit again reflected the calm light of faith and hope, and heavenly love, even as the stilled waters of the lake look up, and reflect the clear blue sky above them shining.

One fine mild evening, when the heat of the day had decreased, and the air was refreshed by the breezes that came across the valley, and over the Gulf of Sisera, from the Mediterranean sea, Vivia and her gentle child sought, as usual, their favourite retreat in the grove. At all times this natural shady arbour was preferable to the confinement of the hut, for it was the hottest season of the year: but in the evening it formed a peculiarly welcome refuge from the noise and merriment of the natives, which generally became very boisterous after sunset. Then the stillness which is generally so observable during the heat of the day among the

inhabitants of these burning climates, was exchanged for wild gaiety, and savage dances; when their shrill cries and frantic gesticulations struck terror into the heart of Elva, and always caused her mother to seek the retirement of the grove. From thence the discordant voices of the revellers were heard indeed, but softened by distance; and the blazing fires which they lighted in the centre of the village, to illumine the sudden and profound darkness of night, looked bright and beautiful, when viewed through the tall stems of the palm trees; while the dark figures of the joyous savages were seen passing rapidly around them in the mazes of the wild dance, or the evolutions of the wilder mock-fight.

Looking down the valley, and towards the great river, all was dark and still. No object met the eye but the pale thin mist that hung over the tributary stream, like an apparition; marking its winding course through the valley, and telling of the fatal diseases that lurked by the rivers, and around the thick groves of Africa, during the months of the sun's greatest power. Vivia was unmindful of danger; for the air blew fresh and balmy through the trees, and

was loaded with the fragrance of a hundred flowering shrubs and creepers that grew around the village; and Elva's light form was bounding round her, in all the grace and activity of childish health and glee.

At length the festivities of the village ceased; and by the dying light of the smouldering fires, Vivia watched the natives retiring to their huts, and all becoming silent and motionless. She called her little girl, and was about to return to her humble dwelling, when Elva drew her attention to a small but brilliant light, that was visible far down the valley, and seemed to be rapidly advancing towards them along the road that ran near the course of the stream. Vivia paused, and looked earnestly at the flickering blaze, which appeared to be that of a flaming torch; and while she stood gazing, the sound of distant wheels, and the tramp of horses on the dry hard sand, became audible.

"It is the road from Carthage!" she involuntarily exclaimed aloud. "Can it be that *he* is sending to me a message of pardon and reconciliation?" And her heart beat violently, and her feet were rivetted to the spot.

"No, no," she continued, still uttering her

thoughts aloud, "I will not cheat my poor weak heart with such vain hopes. He has ceased to love me; perhaps even to think of me. It may even be that ere this another may occupy that place in his noble heart, that once was filled by his despised Christian wife!" And tears fell from the eyes of the exile;—tears of greater bitterness than any that she had lately shed.

Meanwhile the light and the sound approached. The road that led from the village to the river ran near the rising ground occupied by the grove, on the most elevated part of which Vivia stood, and she watched the coming chariot, that now became visible in the light of the torch that was borne by one of the persons who sat in it. The dress of these persons was Roman, and one of them carried arms that glittered in the torch-light. Could it be Marcus himself? The thought sprang up in Vivia's heart, and it almost ceased to beat, so violent was the agitation which that thought, —that hope,—excited. But no! Disappointment was again her lot. The manly form of Marcus was not there. It was not his eagle-eye that looked through the tall stems of the

palm-trees, attracted by the dimly-seen figures of Vivia and her child, as they stood on the rising ground that overlooked the road. It was only an officer of the Proconsul,—the same who had been employed to arrest her in her father's house, and who now sought her in her place of exile, to deliver to her a letter from her father-in-law, Fabius. He was attended only by Rufus, who, as we have seen, was acquainted with the place of his mistress's banishment, but under the strictest charge of secrecy.

With trembling steps Vivia descended from her retreat, and approached the chariot, which waited for her in the road. The Roman officer alighted; and, in the most respectful manner, presented to her the packet with which he was charged, and requested permission to convey her and her little girl in the carriage to their dwelling. Vivia acceded, and they soon reached the humble habitation that had now, for so many weeks, been the home of the tenderly-nurtured daughter of Horatius. Septimius, for that was the officer's name, looked round the rude chamber, and its simple furniture, with an expression of deep commisera-

tion and concern, and he ventured to express his regret at beholding the circumstances to which its noble mistress was reduced, and the hope he entertained that she would permit him to carry back to Carthage such a reply to the letter of Fabius, as would quickly bring a proper equipage to convey her again to her home and her sorrowing friends. Vivia made a grateful reply to these expressions of interest, which she knew to be sincere, for Septimius had been a friend of her husband's long before her marriage, and he had always entertained the highest admiration and respect for the beautiful and amiable wife of his comrade, Marcus. She then retired to the small apartment that served as her own and Elva's sleeping-room, leaving the child to entertain her visitor with her lively and intelligent conversation.

CHAPTER XIV.

In that dead night of mind
When madness were a comfort;—all wild whirl,
All dizzy hurry of racked sense, were rich,
Were rapturous to that blank and dismal void,
Where one incessant miserable thought
Blends with the life, the being of the spirit.

MILMAN.

Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—*Matthew* xi. 28.

THE packet which the exile opened with trembling eagerness, and yet with a sinking heart, contained, as her fears foretold, nothing but a letter from her stern and inexorable father-in-law. There was not a line from Marcus, to express his love or his grief,—not one kind word, written by that dear hand, to tell his broken-hearted and devoted wife, that his affections still were with her, although his sense of duty kept him from her side. No,—Fabius and his son acted on the mistaken idea, that harshness and cold neglect would force the

gentle Vivia to submission; and they hoped to find that her naturally yielding temper had given way beneath the sorrows and privations to which she had already been subjected. It is true, her temper was by nature yielding, and she had ever been ready to relinquish her own *will* and *inclination* to those of any one she loved; but her judgment was clear and strong, and her opinions, when once formed on conviction, were firm and decided. It was, therefore, easier to *persuade* her than to *convince* her; and in the days of her spiritual darkness, she had often been led, by the influence of her affections, to act in a manner that was contrary to her own better judgment. Could any earthly influence now have moved her to a change of conduct, it would have been tenderness, not severity, that would have gained the victory. To this trial, the hardest of all to resist, she was not now subjected; and, had it been otherwise, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is always "*sufficient*" for those who trust in it, would doubtless have enabled her to overcome the temptation. The letter of Fabius only confirmed her fears, that loneliness and misery were to be her portion for life, so

far as her fellow-creatures could ensure them. But they could not banish from her "the Friend who sticketh closer than a brother," and on Him she relied for peace, which no outward circumstances could destroy.

The object of her father-in-law's letter was to demand, once more, her final decision, with regard to her profession of religion. In his own name, and that of her husband, he offered her a free pardon for all that was past, and a full restitution of all her forfeited rights and privileges, if she would outwardly conform to the manners and observances of her family and friends. It was even conceded, that no open or formal renunciation of her opinions should be required of her; but that it should be left to time, and her own good sense, to convince her of her errors, and bring her to a confession of them. On her acceptance of these terms, Fabius declared his willingness again to own her as his daughter-in-law, and also Marcus's readiness to place her at the head of his family, as his loved and honoured wife. But should she again obstinately reject the offers so kindly and undeservedly made to her, then, with a solemn oath, by all the gods of heaven, he

protested that she should be an outcast and an alien for ever; and both herself and her child disowned by Marcus, from whom they would be effectually separated by a legal divorce. He went on to state, that his son had been requested by the Proconsul to undertake a mission to Rome, on business of importance, and that he only waited her reply to decide on his future plans. Should that reply be unfavourable to his wishes, he had resolved on accepting the appointment, which was one of honour and confidence; but if, as he hoped, she was now convinced, that it was her duty, as well as her interest, to yield to the wishes of her husband and her family, every other consideration should give way to his earnest desire to promote her happiness; and he would decline the Proconsul's flattering offer, unless indeed his wife should wish to accompany him to Rome, and share in all the splendour and gaiety that would there await her.

Long did the wretched Vivia remain seated and motionless in her solitary little chamber, with her eyes fixed on the cruel letter that lay before her. On her reply to this letter hung her own future fate, and that of her darling

child. She had but to speak the word, and home, and friends, and honour, and affluence,—and oh! how much more precious than all,—her husband's affection, would be restored to her. And all these blessings were offered at the *apparently small price* of a tacit conformity to a few outward and unimportant forms; while no denial of her inward faith was required, and no prohibition was laid on her with regard to her own private mode of worship, or the instructions she should give to her child. On the other hand her refusal to comply with the demands of her husband and father-in-law (which she could not but acknowledge to be far more generous than she had any right to expect,) would at once, and for ever, divide every tie but one that bound her to earth, or made life dear to her. The husband, whom it was one of her first and most sacred duties to love and to obey, and to promote whose happiness she would have felt no earthly sacrifice too great, would be justly enraged at her apparent disregard of his feelings and wishes. His affections would be blighted, and his domestic comfort destroyed; or if his home was ever again to be made the abode of happiness to

him, it must be by his uniting himself to another in those ties which were to be dissevered with her, and giving to another that heart which it had been her glory and her joy to possess. This thought was worse than death to Vivia; and it overpowered every other reflection. For a time the idea of every other sacrifice, and every other trial, was swallowed up in the one heart-breaking feeling that Marcus would be her husband no longer; that he would break asunder the links that she had believed united them for life, and would be free to form another union now more suitable to him. So deep was the pang this thought produced, that it nearly deprived the unhappy exile of her senses, and made the dread of a perpetual separation from all her other and dearly loved connexions seem comparatively a light affliction. But by degrees the whole of her threatened trial presented itself to her mind in all its most aggravated form; and the weight of sorrow was too great for her weakened frame to bear. She strove to collect her wild and scattered thoughts;—she strove to kneel and ask counsel of her God; for she felt that she was tempted above her strength. But all

thought, all sensation fled; and with a groan of unutterable anguish, she fell senseless on the ground.

Elva's quick ear caught the sound of suffering, and she darted into the inner chamber, whither Lucretia and the Roman officer were quickly summoned by her cries of terror and distress. They laid the unconscious Vivia on her humble couch, and the remedies used by Lucretia soon recalled her to life and to a recollection of the fearful reality of her severe trial. She fixed her eyes on Elva with an expression of the deepest tenderness and pity. Then raising them towards heaven, she clasped her hands together, and softly murmured,—

"Oh, my God! If it be possible remove this cup from me! I cannot sin in asking it, for thus my Saviour prayed in his sorest hour of trial. But, Father, teach me, like Him, to add from my heart,—'Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done!'"

Septimius heard her prayer, and he conjectured from the words, and also from the tone in which they were uttered, that she had resolved to reject the offers of which he knew he was the bearer. His soul was touched by

the sight of her deep distress, and her pious resignation. He felt for Elva too; and he had seen and pitied the grief that weighed down the spirit of his friend Marcus, and which had already wrought a painful change in his appearance. To his apprehension the cause of all this sorrow was very inadequate to its effects; for the worship of one deity in preference to another seemed to him a matter of little importance; and whether all the gods that were worshipped on earth were equally true or equally false, he cared not much to ascertain. But though a free-thinker on the subject of religion, as was but too common with young men of his station and profession, Septimius was endued with kindly feelings, and he was a warm and zealous friend. To witness distress was painful to him, and to relieve it would afford him sincere gratification; and therefore for his own sake, as well as Marcus's, he determined to use his utmost efforts to overcome Vivia's resolution, and to restore her to her husband and to happiness.

In the most respectful manner he addressed her. He dwelt on the evident grief which even a temporary separation from her had caused to Marcus, and on the happy change

which her return would so immediately effect. He was eloquent on the unimportance of the points for which Vivia contended; and for which she seemed, as he feared, about to sacrifice all that was most valuable in life. And he sought to touch her maternal feelings by drawing a strong picture of the sad fate to which her obstinacy would condemn her lovely and gifted child, and of the happy and prosperous lot that would be assured to her by a return to her father's home and protection.

Vivia raised herself as he spoke, and she sat silently, and listened to him quietly to the end; for her feelings were too powerful for utterance, and the struggle was violent within her tempted soul. Septimius thought and hoped that his arguments were prevailing over her intention to reject the offered reconciliation, and he urged her to reply favourably. It was a moment of severe trial: and no mere human strength could have sustained it. Vivia felt it in all its intenseness. She felt her own weakness; and the appalling strength of the Evil one. She felt that to hesitate was to be lost. So she clung to the arm that is "mighty to save," and she raised before her trembling

soul the impenetrable "shield of faith;" and she laid hold on the unconquerable "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;" and thus armed, she met the tempter, and she triumphed over all his deadly assaults.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," she exclaimed; "for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that are of men!"

Then she arose, and taking Elva by the hand, she continued in a calm and steady voice; "Go, Septimius, go! You do but add another drop of bitterness to the cup that is already overflowing. I know and feel,—alas! how deeply,—all that you have urged; I know that the world will deem me mad; for I am choosing what the world calls misery, and rejecting all that this vain world has to offer most dear to the human heart. But I know also that in this lonely place of exile, *one Friend* will be with me and my child, who is able to compensate an hundredfold, for all that we now resign for His sake. The Saviour who died for us, has promised that He will abundantly recompense, even in this life, all who forsake husband, or parents, or children, or friends, for His name's sake; and in the world to come,

He will give them an everlasting crown of glory. Nay, Septimius;" she continued, speaking rapidly, and motioning to him to be silent; for she saw that he was about to renew his arguments and entreaties:—"Nay, Septimius, try me no further. My strength is failing me again; and I would desire to give you my reply to my father-in-law's letter, while I retain the power to do so. Hear me; for this is my final decision. I have declared myself a Christian; and a Christian I must ever be, while life and sense remain to me. And never will I act the part of a hypocrite; and dishonour my Redeemer and my God, by any outward conformity to the rites of idolatry. I know that I should thus be virtually denying the Lord who bought me, and forfeiting my claim to be numbered among His faithful disciples here, and His redeemed people in His kingdom of glory. Then cease to plead with me, Septimius; for you are pleading with me to destroy my immortal soul, and that of my precious child. But oh!" she continued; and now tears sprang to her eyes: "Oh! if you really feel any pity for me, and would wish to lighten my sorrows, let it be by speaking of

me kindly to Marcus. Do not irritate his feelings against me. Do not let him *hate* me!"

All Vivia's assumed firmness gave way at this expression of her inmost fears; and she wept aloud. Septimius did not venture to interrupt her; but he gazed at her with the liveliest sensations of interest and sympathy; and he felt that if Marcus had been there, he must have caught his high-minded and devoted wife to his heart, and have gloried in possessing the affections of such a woman, even though her love for him was subservient to that which she entertained for Jesus of Nazareth!

Elva only spoke: and her sweet childish voice was heard whispering words of love and comfort into the ears of her afflicted mother. But they could not stay her tears; they only flowed the more, as Vivia thought of the blighted existence to which her idolized child was henceforth condemned, and of the hard fate that deprived her of a father's care and love. But she raised her eye of faith to Heaven, and her heart was uplifted in humble prayer and devout adoration to the "high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy;" but who has promised that HE

himself will be a "Father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow." And she was strengthened.

Lucretia had not dared to speak during this trying seene. But now, at her mistress's bidding, she left the inner chamber with Septimius, to offer to him, and to her son Rufus, such refreshment as the hut could afford. And no sooner was she out of Vivia's presence, than she broke forth into bitter and eloquent lamentations, on the perversity and folly that could induce her loved and honoured mistress to choose shame, and poverty, and solitude, and reject the happiest lot that any mortal could desire on earth. She entreated the Roman officer not yet to relinquish all hope of shaking her resolution; but, ere he left the desolate place, to make one more strong appeal to her feelings, and her natural good sense; and urge her, before it is too late, to have pity on herself, and on all who loved her.

Septimius was able to form a better estimate of character than the prejudiced but devoted slave: and he saw clearly that Vivia's nature was not one to be lightly moved, or her resolution such as could be shaken by any arguments

or persuasions that he could use. She evidently *saw* her fate, and was determined to meet it. She *felt* her trial;—yes, felt it in the very depth of her soul;—and was resolved to endure it. A prize was before her;—a *visionary* prize in the estimation of the pagan soldier; but no earthly motive could induce her to forego its pursuit. Septimius read all this in the lovely and heroic countenance of the noble exile; and he would not insult her by any further attempt to change a determination that was so unquestionably founded on the highest sense of duty and principle. He sincerely regretted this determination; but since he felt it to be irreversible, he thought no more of attempting to shake it; and he zealously turned his mind to devise some plan for lightening, at least, the weight of woe which the high-born Christian lady had doomed herself to bear. The rudeness of her dwelling, which was scarcely furnished with the common necessaries of life,—the desolation and solitude of her situation,—the barbarity of the only human beings, except her child and slave, whose presence broke that solitude;—all seemed unspeakably dreadful to the luxurious epicu-

rean soldier. He deemed the punishment of Vivia's crime far too heavy for its venial nature;—for venial it was in the eyes of one to whom all religions were alike: and he resolved, if possible, to place her beyond the reach of the privations and hardships to which she and her interesting child must be subjected so long as they remained in their present wretched situation.

He explained his plans to Lucretia, who listened to them with much satisfaction, and with a very sincere hope that they would not be rejected by her mistress. But Vivia appeared no more that evening. She remained with Elva in her chamber, and the united voices of the mother and child were heard softly raised in prayer to their only friend, before Septimius retired to take up his abode for the night in the dwelling of the native chief; whither Rufus had preceded him, to give notice of his arrival, and to cause proper preparations to be made for his reception.

The following morning the young Roman officer waited on Vivia, to bid her farewell, and to make her the offer of his devoted services in effecting her removal to some civi-

lized place, where she might, at all events, find the outward comforts to which she had ever been accustomed, and also enjoy the society of her fellow-countrymen,—even of her fellow-Christians, if she desired it. Septimius had near relations residing at Alexandria; and he assured Vivia that he could rely on their readiness to receive her, and give her every necessary protection, if she would deign to accept an asylum under their roof. And he entreated her to permit him to make the needful arrangements, and then to return with a proper equipage to convey her to Utica or to Hippo-Zarytus, from either of which ports he doubted not that vessels would, ere long, be sailing to the Egyptian capital.

So eager was the Roman soldier to detail his whole plan, and recommend it to the approval of Vivia, that he did not allow her to interrupt him, as she endeavoured to do, as soon as she perceived the nature of his request. So she remained silent, with her hands clasped together on little Elva's shoulder, and her sad eyes fixed on Elva's pale countenance, until Septimus ceased to speak, and looked earnestly in her face for a reply.

When Septimius entered the hut that morning, he was struck by the altered appearance both of Vivia and her child. All the brilliance, and all the beautiful animation, that, even in sorrow, had added such a charm to the symmetry to the Roman lady's features, was fled. A stillness,—it might be called a deadness, overspread her countenance, and she seemed ns longer the being endued with exquisite sensibility, and singular mental powers, that she had shown herself the preceding evening. All feeling seemed exhausted and extinct. The pallor of her cheek was unvaried by the slightest tinge of colour; and the fire of her eye was extinguished. Grief,—settled, *hopeless* grief, had wrought sad ravages in one brief night; and a stranger would scarcely have recognized the admired Vivia of Carthage, in the wan, stricken form that now met the eye of Septimius. Elva likewise was changed. Years seemed added to her young life; and a depth of thought far beyond her age, and very painful to see on such infantine features, sat on her face, so lately beaming with health and spirits. Elva had fully comprehended the extent of her mother's sorrow during the past

night. And she had felt, as she had never felt before, the desolate situation to which they were both, for the future, doomed. And these feelings had struck a chill on her warm young heart, that time alone could remove. The child looked ill; and she was ill, in body and in spirit. The unhealthy damps of the preceding evening, to which she had been too long exposed. had proved injurious to her delicate frame; and the subsequent trial to her spirit had been too great for its powers. The sweet child was really suffering, and needed all the attention, and all the comforts, that her former happy home would have afforded,—but which were not to be procured in a wilderness, inhabited only by savages. And her mother felt this, and felt it bitterly; but it did not mislead her with regard to her path of duty.

When Septimius paused for her reply, she thanked him for the kind interest he manifested in her fate, but steadily rejected all his offers. It was her husband's wish that she should remain where she then resided; and his wishes should, she declared, be laws to her in all things that were not contrary to the laws of her God.

Marcus had not yet severed the tie that bound her to him for life; and she was still his lawful, his devoted, his obedient wife: and in nothing should he have to find any fault with her, save for her religion.

"The time may come," she added sadly, and a slight emotion crossed her pallid countenance as she spoke the words; "the time may come when he will cease to have any claim to my obedience, though never to my love. Then I must act for myself. But while I am his wife I will live or die faithful to him, and true to all my promises. Tell him so, Septimius."

"I will," cried the soldier with enthusiasm. "I will tell my friend that he is casting from him a treasure such as worlds could not purchase. I will tell him that he ought to come into this desert, and kneel before you, and sue for your pardon, and for your return to his home. What matters it which divinity you worship? Your husband should worship you!"

"Cease such vain flattery," replied Vivia hastily; and now the colour came to her marble brow, and flushed it deeply, but soon faded away, leaving it paler than before. "Do not insult me, Septimius, by addressing to me lan-

guage that is unsuited to a weak, sinful, human being like myself. I am a criminal in my husband's eyes; and it is leniency in him to punish my crime with banishment instead of death. But Oh, were it not for the one treasure that is left me, how far preferable would death be to me than exclusion from his heart! For Elva's sake I am content to live; and if I teach her to love and honour her Saviour with her first and best affections, yet tell Marcus that I will teach her to love and honour *him* as the best, the dearest of all on earth; though, alas! now so blind to what would constitute his happiness here, and ensure it hereafter. I am weak, Septimius. You must leave me now: and, believe me, I shall ever retain a grateful recollection of your kind, but mistaken efforts to serve me. Farewell."

Vivia waved her hand to the young officer, and retired with Elva to the inner room: and soon the chariot that bore Septimius back to Carthage was heard rolling across the valley. And Vivia's fate was sealed!

"*As the exile's day*, so had been her strength." "*With the temptation*, a way to escape" had also been given to her, that she might "be able to

bear it." And she had borne it, and had triumphed over it, not in her *own strength*, but in that of the Lord her Redeemer. Now it was over; and she was permitted to feel her own utter weakness and helplessness, that she might the more gratefully acknowledge the divine help she had received, and the more confidingly trust in that divine help in every future hour of trial. In body and in spirit she was exhausted, and even her powers of reflection seemed to have deserted her, so dark was "*that dead night of mind*" into which she sank. The sense of suffering, and of suffering without one ray of hope, was all that she retained. For hours she sat, almost motionless; and neither spoke, nor regarded either her pensive child, or her active and affectionate attendant; and Lucretia began to fear for her reason and her life. Her eyes were fixed upon the lofty hills that intervened between her and Carthage, but her soul had passed the boundary, and was wrapped in the contemplation of those so dear to her, who dwelt beyond those hills, and on whom she could never again hope to look during the remainder of her sad earthly existence.

"I shall see them; I shall see *him*, no

more!" she murmured faintly. *No more;*—surely those are the saddest words that the human breast can utter; for they exclude *hope*, that beauteous star that gilds the lot of humanity! "*No more!* O, how majestically mournful are those words? They sound like the roar of the wind through a forest of pines.*"

"Mother," said Elva, as soon as she heard Vivia's voice; "Dear mother, will you come out with me? I am very weary." And the child took her mother's cold hand in both her own, and tried to draw her towards the door.

All that day Elva had lingered near her mother; nor had Lucretia been able to persuade her to join her young wild companions, or even to leave the house; although Vivia had seemed alike unconscious either of her presence, or her absence. Now her gentle voice touched her mother's frozen heart, and woke a milder feeling there; and the touch of her little hands aroused her to a full consciousness of all that had passed, and of all that was present.

"My child!" she cried; "my own, my darling Elva! And have I so long been unmind-

* Professor Longfellow.

ful of you,—the only treasure now left to me on earth?" And as she caught the little child in her arms, and clasped her to her aching heart, tears, welcome tears, came to her glazed and burning eyes, and relieved the dull oppression that had so long overpowered her.

"Let us pray, my Elva," she said. "Let us bless God, who has so mercifully supported us hitherto, and has permitted us to remain together, and at liberty. And let us ask Him yet to protect and bless us, and suffer us not to fall from our faith."

They knelt together, and Lucretia abruptly left the room; for it chafed her spirit to see her mistress seeking for consolation in that which was the cause of all her sufferings. She hastened to prepare refreshment for Vivia's sinking frame; from which she hoped for far better results than from her prayers; and her care in this respect was needed, for it was many hours since the exile had taken any nourishment. But she was wrong in her estimate of the power of that spiritual sustenance that Vivia sought for herself and her child; and she greatly wondered at the composed and almost cheerful expression that dwelt on their coun-

tenances, when presently they joined her in the outer apartment, and partook of the simple repast that she set before them.

Then Vivia led Elva from the hut, and powerfully exerted herself to raise the spirits of the sensitive little creature, who looked to her alone on earth for happiness. "She shall not be blighted by my sadness," thought her mother, "so long as I have strength afforded me to stifle my consuming grief, and minister to her comfort and her joy." And the Lord helped her to maintain this high-minded resolution, and to act in that healthy spirit so beautifully inculcated by a writer of the present day. "Look not mournfully into the past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the future, without fear, and with a manly heart.*"

Elva was refreshed by the evening breeze on the shore of the gulf, and cheered by seeing her loved mother endeavouring to smile on her again, and reply in her own tone of voice to all her lively questions and remarks: and Vivia hoped and believed that the indisposition which had so much alarmed her in the morning, had

* Professor Longfellow.

been merely the effect of over-excitement, and had entirely passed away; and she resolved that no weakness of her own should again expose the precious child to agitation such as she was too young, and, unfortunately, too susceptible, to bear without injury.

The lonely exile was indeed "weary and heavy laden;" but she came unto the Lord in submission and in faith, and she "found rest unto her soul."

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